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**E G O 7**

## *MY BOOKS*

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GEMEL IN LONDON

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ON AN ENGLISH SCREEN  
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THEIR HOUR UPON THE STAGE  
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EGO  
EGO 2  
EGO 3  
EGO 4  
EGO 5  
EGO 6





*The Author*

*Photo Hans Man*

*Fr.*

# E G O 7

*EVEN MORE OF THE  
AUTOBIOGRAPHY  
OF  
JAMES AGATE*

The universe is but an atom  
before the vastness of one's self!

The *Diary of*  
W. C. MACREADY



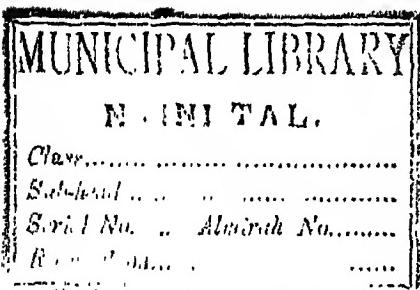
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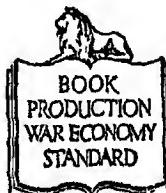
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1941.



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## I 944

Jan. 1        "I shall shut myself up in my ivory tower." Ivory Saturday. tower be blowed ! Korda has offered me, and I have accepted, the post of Literary Adviser to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer British Studios, Ltd. My job is the spying out of good film material in modern novels or even old ones, and obviously I shan't be able to divulge any of my discoveries. This means that I am hedged in by subjects I must not, and subjects I will not, write about. I am not presumptuous enough to discuss the coming victory, and I care very little about what happens afterwards—I shall be quite satisfied with a Europe in which any German caught goose-stepping is shot at sight. So much for abroad. At home I ask no more of any world I inhabit than that talent shall come to the top and lack of it sink to the bottom—with plenty of bottom for that lack to sink to. But since many citizens will be greatly opposed—Runyon's phrase—to such views, I shall not air them further.

What, then, is left for a poor diarist ? In the matter of budding genius I am de-virtuosified ; no new Kligerman looms. Jock, in the Navy, vouchsafes no line. Pavia ? At the moment I am out of temper with the old boy. My standing instructions to him are to tell all importunates that my fee for reading their wretched plays is £5, and that in the event of their being able to afford this my fee becomes £10. And so on. This morning he came into my room with a sickly look of triumph, and holding out a limp parcel, said : " You've hooked 'em both, James." What I had "hooked" was a cheque for £10 and a drama in blank verse about Nell Gwynne ! Net result—Revenue gets £8, Leo thirty shillings for reading the rubbish and writing some sort of opinion, I sign my name, and take myself out to lunch on the remaining ten bob.

But this is no matter for *Ego 7*, that book which is to determine whether, as Professor Hersford said of Ibsen's *Master Builder*, "the author's hand retains its cunning and can still

place one more crown, under the eyes of expectant Europe, upon the towering fabric of his finished work." (*Stage direction: Fanfare for trumpets.*)

**Jan. 3** Ivor Brown has sent me *Just Another Word*, the *Monday*. sequel to his *A Word in Your Ear*. He cites Cleopatra's lament on the death of Antony,

O wither'd is the garland of the war,  
which Basic English would turn, I suppose, into  
Off colour is the flower of the war.

A nicer exercise would be to translate Othello's

And, O you mortal engines, whose rude throats  
The immortal Jove's dread clamours counterfeit.

To my ear

And, O you dangerous machines,  
Whose openings try to make a noise like thunder

is not at all the same thing. It's no use telling me that there is room for both languages. Human nature will always take the line of least resistance, and when it is a question of learning will always prefer the easy to the difficult.

**Jan. 4** The Gentle Art. Have sent the following to Ralph *Tuesday*. Hill, the musical critic of the *Radio Times*:

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*

*January 2, 1944*

DEAR RALPH,

How can the B.B.C. be such fools as to kill Ireland's *London Overture* by following it immediately with Elgar's *In the South*? And why do things by halves? Why not kill it beforehand? To ensure the job being done properly I took the precaution of playing my record of *Cockaigne* immediately before John's work. Which made the clever, scholarly thing as dry as the bit of cold turkey I found left over from Christmas. By the way, I spent this afternoon at the Zoo with Edgar Lustgarten feeding the bears with what I pretended were bits of Bliss, Britten, Moeran, and Co.

Ever,

JAMES

1944]

EGO 7

*Jan. 7 Friday.* Terry Rattigan fulfilled an old promise to take me to *Flare Path* again. A box, and all very grand. It was the first time I had been taken to the theatre—in the sense of being given a treat—since my early days in Manchester. Some friends with whom I was dining told me they had an unexpected treat for me; they had secured a box for George Alexander. I forget the name of the play, which I had already seen and written about in the *Manchester Guardian*. In my notice I had rebuked Alexander for saying to a blackmailer, “Your conduct is despicable,” remarking that I thought a famous London actor should know the rule about throwing the accent back. I can still see and hear Alexander on the occasion of my second visit face up to his blackmailer and say, “Sir, your conduct is *dastardly!*” Afterwards to Prunier’s, where we were joined by Adrienne Allen and Ronnie Squire. The supper was even grander than the play, and included Pommery and Greno 1928, and some very good brandy. Then to Terry’s flat in Albany, where we sat talking till the small hours of the morning.

*Jan. 13 Thursday.* Letter from James Bridie :

3 Camstradden Drive East  
Bearsden  
Dumbartonshire

12th January, 1944

MY DEAR JAMES,

As I think *These Were Actors* must be very nearly the best thing you’ve done I cannot resist writing to congratulate you on it. Your way of establishing Kean as the hero of the book is quite masterly, and I’ll have to read it over and over again to find out exactly how you do it.

It is interesting to reflect that Kean did a pub-crawl in Greenock and a trip in a sailing-boat over to Bute in the costume of Richard III illustrated in your book.

I forget whether I sent you my lecture on the Theatre, but I do herewith in case you can’t sleep at nights.

Regards,  
JAS. BRIDIE

I have replied :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*  
*January 18th, 1944*

MY DEAR BRIDIE,

A compliment from a craftsman like yourself is a compliment worth having. But I hate to disillusion you ; I had no intention of making Kean the centre of the book. It was only when I read the proofs that I *saw what had happened*. I think Kean must have arranged it himself ! He always took the centre of the stage, and I'm prepared to believe he's doing it still.

All the same, many thanks.

Ever your sincere  
 JAMES

*Jan. 14* I have been reading Sacheverell Sitwell's *Splendours Friday. and Miseries* and wondering why he drags in Balzac.

The defect of Sitwell's considerable qualities as a writer is that he too often tumbles over into nonsense. About Bach :

This is the Ancient of all time ; and musical genius has no existence by the side of him. He is the only one. The others have but little meaning. Compared with his solid sculpture they are but arabesques in stucco.

And again :

There is more wisdom in him than in religion ; more of truth and beauty than in all the prayers and aspirations.

To talk of *Messiah*, the Ninth Symphony, *Gerontius*, as stucco in comparison with *anything* is pseudo-highbrow bosh at its boshiest.

*Jan. 15* From a lady in the Middlesex Hospital :  
*Saturday.*

Do you still collect "bits" about people ? If so, my odd acquaintance with Dame Madge Kendal may amuse you.

When we were young my sister and I were sent with our governess every year to Filey (Yorks) ; and for one summer, I think 1910, I was convinced that I was really a Red Indian, and only answered to the name Golden Eagle. Of course we had to do a lot of stalking, as all good Indians do, and one day we stalked to some purpose—as you shall hear. One morning, while we were buying our penny buns at the

Swiss cake-shop, in came a large ugly woman. She was clothed in white from head to foot, not "in white samite, mystic, wonderful," but in coarse white linen, huge cotton gloves, and laced buckskin boots, topped by what was known in those days as a motoring hat. It was Mrs Kendal, and she proceeded to buy a dozen éclairs. I had never seen so many bought all at once, and was most impressed.

Now the fun begins, so read on. After supper that night Golden Eagle and his squaw went out to do the nightly stalking. My plan was to climb a steep cliff, on top of which was a high hedge, the idea being to see what was on the other side. We made the ascent and, covered with clay and mud, pushed our way through the hedge to find a flat green lawn, and beyond this a long, very low white house. It was then that we heard *The Voice* (we always called her that afterwards), and the voice belonged to the ugly big woman in white. She was alone, walking up and down the lawn reciting loudly, and at moments munching from a large plate of éclairs (greedy old girl). Of course she saw us, and looked furious, but in a few minutes, having explained that we were Indians, we were sitting on the veranda with her, sharing the éclairs, while she read *Hiawatha*. After that we spent many happy evenings when she was alone. A few years later she sold the place just as it stood to some wealthy Sheffield people. I knew their daughter, and often went to the white house. Some whim made her leave everything; I remember the blotting-paper, all inky on the desk, and even her work-basket. I was given her thimble, not as a souvenir, but because it fitted me.

If you have read so far, here is the sequel: Twenty years after, I married and lived in a house in Portland Place, just below hers at the corner of Duchess Street. She stopped me—or rather commanded me to stop—one day, and talked and petted my Bedlington terriers. After that she often waved from her window, and one day beckoned me in. She asked me how I had spent the morning, and when I said retrimming a hat she produced one of *The Bonnets*, on which we did some major repairs with some horrible purple pansies!!! She died soon afterwards, and I never reminded her of the old Filey days, in case they were linked up with something sad. For the idea of selling everything seems peculiar to me.

Peculiar indeed! Madge K. was of all women the least likely to indulge a mere whim. I feel that there is some secret here never to be penetrated, like that of the *Marie Celeste*.

Jan. 17 The management of Studio One had a notion amounting to genius when it prefaced the revival of *Un Carnet de Bal* with something called *Dreams Come True*. This picture showed Frances Day first as a soubrette singing Hungarian folk-songs in a Viennese café, and then warbling the same ditties from the tops of hay-carts, weeding a herbaceous border, to the little pigs in the farmyard, to the swans of some stately river. Whereupon the parents of the Boy realised that the Girl, though she might be an actress at night, must, in view of such warbling, be possessed of daytime purity. At which the cultured French audience, assembled to see Duvivier's masterpiece once again, broke into low but audible derision. It was interesting to note how much one remembered of *Un Carnet de Bal*. Yes, there it all was, just as it had been in the mind's eye any time these ten years or whatever length of time has passed since its making. That dream-waltz in those dream-clothes, taking place in a ballroom of unimaginable splendour, beneath incredible chandeliers, amidst what Balzac called "le luxe insolent et écrasant"—one remembers asking oneself how in circumstances of unheard-of grandeur Christine could possibly have picked up those lovers whose point is not shadiness of character but mediocrity of station. One of them becomes a hairdresser, another runs a night-club, the third is a grocer, the fourth an abortionist—not one of them has elegance. It is not until the end that one realises that the grandeur of the ball existed only in Christine's sixteen-year-old imagination. There she is twenty years later dancing once more in the scrubby, flag-festooned dance-hall of the little country town, surrounded by girls in frocks of flowered gingham and cretonne, courted by hobbledehoys in ill-fitting dress suits. Time has not laid a finger on this film's magnificent acting; the picture would be worth going to see if only for the priest of that great actor, Harry Baur. Then there is the Provençal of Raimu, the ignoble shyster of Louis Jouvet, the inimitable clowning of Fernandel, the exquisite playing of Françoise Rosay, and the brilliant self-effacement of Marie Bell, who never allows Christine to be more than a necessary peg. One could write a whole essay on the minor characters in this film. Characters like the old housekeeper in the first episode, or the blackmailing little rat, or the abortionist's wife. And with what delicacy is the whole thing rounded off!

"One's first ball," says Christine to her adopted son, "is as important as one's first cigarette." And then, as the curtains close, you hear her say to herself, "Just as important. And no more." It seems to me that with this film the art of picture-directing came to an end. I have never seen anything since which has been within measurable distance of it, or if I have it has been a French film.

*Jan. 18* At last I have been able to get my wireless set mended.

*Tuesday.* For six months the hum and crackle have been "contending which is the mightier," as Queen Gertrude says in her weather report about Hamlet. The first piece to come through in all the purity of its pristine tinkle was Haydn's Piano Sonata in D, No. 7. And now I find I miss the filthy noises, as the poor people in Loti's story *Le Mur d'en Face* missed that nasty, leprous obstruction.

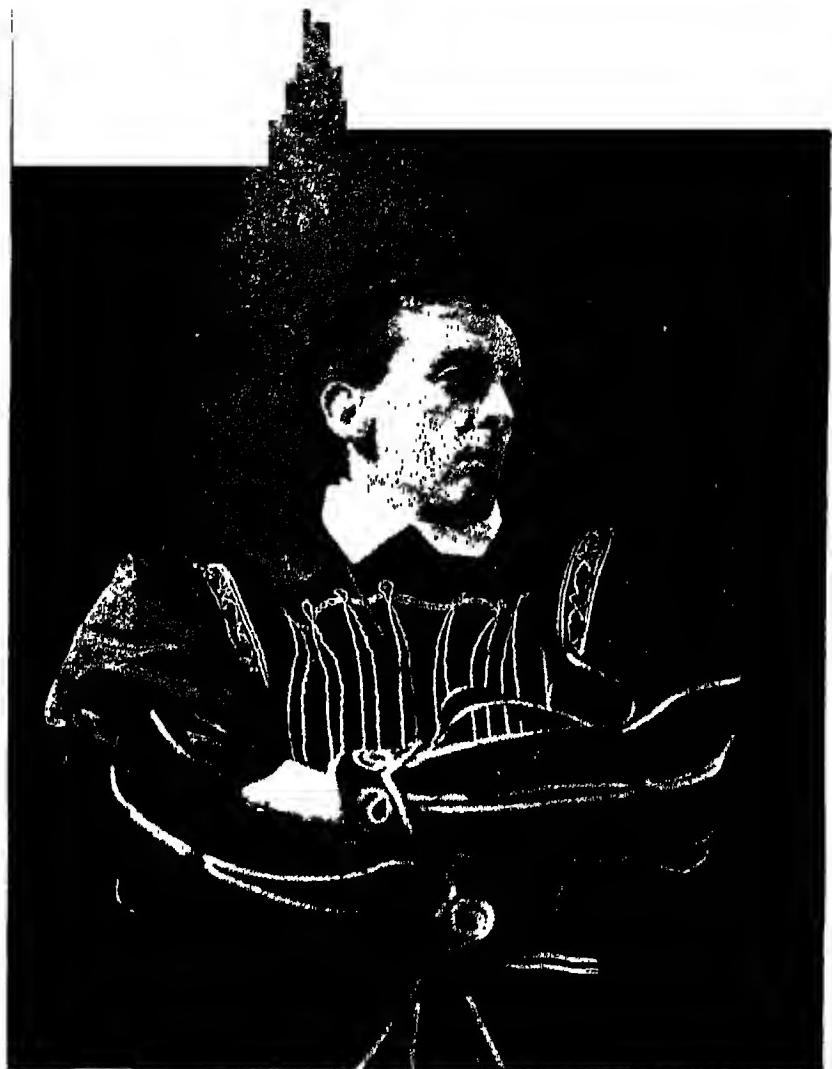
*Jan. 22* General Montgomery was the guest of honour at *Saturday.* the Savage Club luncheon to-day. I sat next but

one to him, with an admiral in between. Quiet and unassuming.\* Which suggests that the figure we have seen on the films is largely a pose, though perhaps it is not easy to look modest when you are being cheered by ten thousand victorious troops. The nose, however, is formidable, and of Voltairean proportions. It fell to me to make the speech, and I judged that the occasion was not one for facetiousness. Took my peroration from Thackeray :

One of the greatest of a great man's qualities is success ; 'tis the result of all the others ; 'tis a latent power in him which compels the favour of the gods, and subjugates fortune. Of all his gifts I admire that one in the great Marlborough. To be brave ? Every man is brave. But in being victorious, as he is, I fancy there is something divine. In presence of the occasion, the great soul of the leader shines out, and the god is confessed. Death itself respects him, and passes by him to lay others low. War and carnage flee before him to ravage other parts of the field, as Hector before the divine Achilles. You say he hath no pity ; no more have the gods, who are above it, and superhuman. The fainting battle gathers strength at his aspect ; and, whenever he rides, victory charges with him.

Delivered this in my most swelling style.

Jan. 25 There is one word that I want somebody to use about me when I die—that is the word “prodigious.” I have been, I am, and propose to remain, as long as this machine holds together, a prodigious worker. Bulk, though not everything, is of enormous importance. So let us talk about bulk. Hazlitt wrote some  $2\frac{1}{2}$  million words in the course of eighteen years. (This does not include the *Life of Napoleon*.) In the same period Balzac wrote some  $4\frac{1}{2}$  million words. Dickens’s books, starting in 1836 with *Sketches by Boz* and finishing in 1870 with *Edwin Drood*, run to some  $5\frac{1}{2}$  million words. A period, note, of thirty-four years. At this point I rise modestly, clear my throat, and propose my Prodigious Self. Let me not beat about the bush. Let me say that since September 1921, when I joined the *Saturday Review*, I have written something over 6 million words! And this in the course of twenty-two years, not thirty-four!! I am well aware that Dickens did a great deal of journalistic work which I have not included. As against this, I have not counted any of my seven years’ work on the *Manchester Guardian*. Or my seven years with the B.B.C. And the reward? It may be of interest to budding writers to know that whereas my journalism has brought me in an average of 2s. 4d. a line, my books have earned for me an average of just over 2d. a line! Note further that this is 2d. a line gross. Say that I sell 8000 copies of *Ego*, my royalty on which is half a crown. (The bookseller who hands you my book across the counter, saying, “I agree with you, madam, quite an entertaining writer,” gets six shillings for so doing. I have no complaint. This is one of the anomalies of that individualist and capitalist system which I will defend to my last breath.) Gross profit, therefore, on a volume of *Ego* is £875. But what is it net? Typing, re-typing, typing again and typing yet once more—a job I have had great pleasure in entrusting to that adorable and super-dexterous keyboard-manipulator, Cynthia Kenyon—comes to £75 a volume. Douceurs to other people run away with £25. Proof corrections with £25—and this is very light. Presentation copies account for £20. Taxis to and from the adorable Cynthia, because I don’t trust the post in war-time, and the duplication of everything to York come to another £20. The illustrations run away with £10. Total £175. Take £175 from £875 and £200 remains. Whereupon Stanley Rubinstein intervenes, and on behalf of the Inland



*Photo Edward Mandelian*

*Robert Helpmann as Hamlet*  
*(See p. 27)*



*John Martin-Harvey*  
(See p. 90)

Revenue authorities helps himself to £125. Net profit on a volume of *Ego*, therefore, is £75. Which, stretched over a period of the year-and-a-half which it takes to write, is exactly £1 a week!

But I go further. I am sick of people who talk of me as if I were a financial ignoramus. I am, of course, nothing of the sort. Since I wrote my first article in the *Saturday Review* twenty-two years ago I have earned some £70,000, and no method of computation can make it more. Of this, income tax has certainly run away with all of £10,000 and more. What have I done with the balancee of, say, £60,000? I have kept a secretary. A chauffeur and a valet at least half the time. I have motored as many as 15,000 miles a year. I have had bungalows and country cottages. I have kept a stable of show-horses and exhibited them all over Great Britain. I have played golf everywhere. I have had my little trips abroad. I have never stinted myself in champagne and cigars, and I have done a reasonable amount of entertaining. I have—at least, up to the present war—worn good clothes, linen, shoes, hats. I have tipped golf caddies, waiters, and taxi-drivers extravagantly. I have kept a small army of pensioners. The point is not the worth or non-worth of these activities but their cost. What is the point is that anybody who can do this and keep on doing it over a period of twenty years and spend no more than a beggarly £60,000 over it has made a very little money go a very long way. I admit that I could have led a more economical life. I could have scraped this and cheapespared that. But I infinitely prefer having a great deal to look back upon to having a few pounds with which to look forward to nothing I care about. I have been much pestered lately by young men and even young women wanting to write a Life, make me the centre of a novel, turn me into copy. The poor dears haven't realised that I have been before them. All that remains is for somebody to write of me: "He was a fair dramatic critic, an admirable diarist, a prodigious worker, and a financial genius of the first order."

(Stage direction: *Trumpets ad lib.*)

Jan. 26      I don't think my importance warrants immortality.  
Wednesday. But I want my work to last, *and so that it may perpetuate itself, not necessarily me*. I must perish; so be it! But that is no reason why the things I have loved

should perish. Consider Tristan l'Hermite's exquisite *Le Promenoir des Deux Amans*:

Auprès de cette grotte sombre  
Où l'on respire un air si doux,  
L'onde lutte avec les cailloux,  
Et la lumière avecque l'ombre.

Ces flots, las de l'exerceice  
Qu'ils ont fait dessus ce gravier,  
Se reposent dans ce vivier,  
Où mourut autrefois Narcisse. . . .

L'ombre de cette fleur vermeille  
Et ecelle de ces jons pendans  
Paraissent estre là-dedans  
Les songes de l'eau qui sommeille.

The poet was faced with three possibilities : (1) that he should win immortality as the author of these verses ; (2) that he should be known as a poet whose verses were lost ; (3) that they should appear in anthologies under the heading "Anonymous." Can it be doubted that he would have rejected (2), and that if he could not have (1) he would have chosen (3) ? Similarly I should like to be known to posterity as the author of *Ego*. If I cannot have this, then let *Ego* win immortality—Author Unknown.

*Jan. 27* A dreadful day. Spend the morning wrestling *Thursday*. simultaneously with my stuff for Monday's broadcast—"What I am Reading Now" series—and a *Tatler* article. Neither will come right, which means that I sit down to lunch at the very moment the curtain is going up at the "Q" Theatre. Feeling tired and nervy, I drink a lot of whiskey, hoping to sleep it off in the hire-service car. Not a wink. Arrive at Kew in time for the second act and immediately begin to drowse. But the play insists on keeping me awake, and I cling to the theory that there will be time for a snooze on the way back. But Jack de Leon has other views. He has arranged that the moment the theatre has emptied, the players will go through the first act again, for my benefit ! This is magnanimity itself, and I try to look and say the right and proper thing. Wherefore I am still drinking tea with the company as the curtain is going up on Emyl Williams's new play at the St Martin's. Dash down to West Street and am terribly bored,

possibly because Welsh idiosyncrasy does not amuse me as the Irish does. My brother Sydney once told me this story. When he set up in practice as a solicitor in South Wales his first client was a farmer. The farmer's case was that, driving along a steep embankment, he saw a motor-car approaching, that he went to the animal's head, held up his hand and shouted, "Stop now; my mare, she is very nervous." That the motorist disregarded his warning and came on, whereupon the mare went over the embankment and was impaled upon some stakes. In due course the case came on for trial, and the farmer, going into the witness-box, deposed as follows : " I said, ' Come on now. My mare, she is very sensible ! ' " The moral of Emlyn's play, if it had one, seemed to be that murder is a little thing, and an Eistedfodd a big one.

*Trouvailles.* Introducing, as they say, a new series to replace the old *Fatras*. This will range from the rewarding to the imbecile, and here is the first :

Of course we do not mean to say that in no case should a man publish his experience of society in the circle in which he moves. Frequently it is most advantageous that this should be done, and society may be a great gainer by it. This can only occur in one of two cases. Either where the experiences of the individual concerned are rare, and consequently not such as fall within the scope of other persons' notice ; or where the writer himself is of a mind so superior to other men, that common things seen from his point of view are worth preserving. Doubtless most of the aspirants for literary fame who write autobiographies, believe themselves to fulfil the last of these conditions. They publish the events of their own lives not because they are uncommon, but because little things, stamped with the impress of a great mind, become momentous. Snubbin's courtship was like most other persons', but then, Snubbin himself—there's the difference.

*Review of George Vandenhoff's "Leaves from an Actor's Note-book," January 1860*

*Jan. 28*     "What is it," Walkley once asked, "gives so peculiar *Friday*. a charm to the criticism of Dryden ? Is it not his discursiveness, his little descriptive embellishments—as, for example, in the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, the river trip,

the listening for the distant thunder of the Dutch guns 'on that memorable day,' the moonlight on the water, the landing at Somerset Stairs among the crowd of French dancers ? " A point Walkley did *not* make was the possibility of discursiveness being something more than ornament. A cloak, for example. A way of saying nothing. Take nuns. I am the last person to write about nuns or pronounce on a play about them. I can more readily see myself as contortionist or lion-tamer than mewed-up recluse. I belong to the breed of Dumas' Fouquet, whom Stevenson called " the waster, the lover of good cheer and wit and art, the swift transactor of much business." I see myself, in Dumas' own words, " l'homme de bruit, l'homme de plaisir, l'homme qui n'est que parce que les autres sont." What can one seeing himself so have to say to nuns ? Confront me with a play like Sierra's *The Cradle Song*, which I last saw some seventeen years ago, and I am tempted to take a leaf out of Dryden's book and hark back to *Primerose*, that sentimental drivel with which, during the last war, the Comédie-Française was attracting *poilus* on leave. All about a pure girl turning down a young man because he was rich, and going into a convent. Whereupon her would-be swain went off to South America and, coming back with a story about having lost his money, renewed his suit and was accepted. Fortunately Primerose, being a novice, had not cut off her hair, and there was a touching moment when the bridegroom announced that instead of losing his fortune in Peruvian bark he had, in fact, doubled it. An elaboration of this, a playful glance at Shakespeare's Isabella, and some toying with the notion that Angelo would have been better punished if he had been forced to marry that cold prude instead of the wilting Mariana—and here would be Sunday's article. Or so I thought last night before seeing the play again. Alas, my conscience would not let me off so easily, since I had the suspicion that Sierra's piece is the most beautiful thing seen in London since *A Month in the Country*, and that it would be unpardonable not to say so. Worked at my notice till 1 A.M., when I went to bed. At half-past I was back at my desk, where I worked until four. This morning I found the MS. in a condition like that of the picture in Balzac's *Le Chef-d'Oeuvre Inconnu*, so bescribbled and bescrabbled that even Leo, used to my hieroglyphics, couldn't read it. By the way, I suppose I

shall never get credit for the quotations I reject! All day yesterday I was haunted by a phrase of Verlaine. Something about a lot of girls and their *gentil babil*. Finally looked it up, and found it in the sonnet beginning

Parsifal a vaincu les Filles, leur gentil  
Babil et la luxure amusante. . . .

Decided that Sierra's play has nothing to do with Parsifal, that its vanquished are not *filles* but *jeunes filles*, and that *luxure* is wholly out of place in a convent. So I sacrificed *gentil babil*.

*Jan. 29* Discover from my proofs that I propose to tell *Saturday Express* readers about how

Two stern-faced men set out from Lynn,  
Through the cold and heavy mist;  
And *Abraham Lincoln* walked between,  
With gyves upon his wrist.

The result of overwork? Fortunately I caught it in time.

*Jan. 31* My broadcast talk was fairly successful, I think. *Monday*. Here is a bit of it :

I have been reading the correspondence between the composer Richard Wagner and the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, edited by Nietzsche's sister. I remember noting two passages, the juxtaposition of which seemed to me to account very exactly for Germany's tragedy. *The reason for that tragedy is the complete lack of any sense of humour in the German make-up.* My secretary, who has lived in Germany for many years, tells me that it is not unusual at German dinner-parties for the host to rap on the table and announce that one of the guests is going to say something funny. Whereupon the rest of the company murmur "Aha, ein Witz!" and start to laugh before the guest has begun his story. They then laugh through three-quarters of the tale, and leave off laughing before the teller has got to the point, which anyhow they don't understand.

And now for my two passages. The first describes a typical Wagner birthday. Some of you may like to be reminded that Wagner's second wife Cosima was the daughter of Liszt, the great pianist and composer. She had married Hans von Bülow, also a famous pianist as well as conductor,

and after giving him four daughters ran off with Wagner. Von Bülow then divorced Cosima, and the three were great friends afterwards, which was all very nice for them. And now for my first passage, written by Miss Nietzsche:

"The birthday festivities at Triebschen were uncommonly beautiful this year. Frau Cosima had transformed the entire house into a flower garden, and the four little girls—dressed alike in white, with wreaths of roses in their hair—were stationed at different places to represent living flowers. Frau Cosima, with Siegfried on her lap, occupied the centre of this tableau. At eight o'clock in the morning the strains of the *Huldigungsmarsch* came from the garden, where was stationed a military band of forty-five players from the barracks in Lucerne. Frau Cosima herself had given them instructions in regard to the tempi, and at first Wagner was so overcome that he was unable to utter a word, and Frau Cosima almost regretted having planned the poetic and romantic programme. Daniela, the eldest of the four Bülow daughters, had conceived the pretty idea of liberating her five dearly beloved birds in honour of Uncle Richard's birthday. This formed one of the most charming episodes of the day. After reciting a poem written for the occasion Daniela opened the cage and four of the birds flew joyfully into the air. But the fifth, unaccustomed to freedom, at first refused to leave the cage and had to be taken out and placed on a bush in the garden. Later in the day it must have fallen from its perch and been devoured by the dog. The children were not allowed to learn anything of this little tragedy, but the fate of their feathered friend made a very mournful impression upon Wagner and Frau Cosima. But despite these clouds, the day was one long to be remembered, though with mixed feelings of sadness and joy, as is all that is precious in life."

I ask you to note that Miss Nietzsche has not the beginnings of a shadow of a suspicion that there is anything funny about the solemn absurdity of all this. Now here is the second passage, which again is from Miss Nietzsche's pen :

"My brother told me that once, after a day of heart-breaking experiences, he saw several regiments of our marvellous German cavalry rush by to almost certain death on the field of battle. Superb in their vigour and courage, these men conveyed the impression of a race that is born to conquer, to rule, or—to die. It was then that he was made to feel deeply, for the first time, that the strongest and highest will to live does not reach its fullest expression in a miserable struggle for existence, but in the will to con-

flict, the will to power and superiority. My brother now became convinced that a great military leader has the right to sacrifice his fellow-men, if, by so doing, he can achieve the highest aims—in fact, he conceived this to be the positive duty of generals."

Well, doesn't it all hang together—the solemn nonsense with the birds and the solemn nonsense about the German will to superiority? Wagner was a mighty genius and Nietzsche a man of enormous brain. But deep down in both was the fundamental, owl-solemn, goose-stepping, humourless Teutonic ass.

Feb. 2        A letter :

Wednesday.

56 Rhinegold Avenue, N.W.3

DEAR MR AGATE,

I am a good friend of Frl. Erna Katzengebiss [see *Ego* 6, p. 235], who has given me your Adress and with whom I studied Philosophie at the University of Vienna before the war. I am also cousin to Dr Israel Bauchpresser [see *Ego* 6, p. 236]. Now I write to you and ask for a very great kindness, mindful also that what I ask must be to you a great sacrifice, that is the loss of your Time. But I am not afraid, as from your books I feel you to be a man of tender sentiment, an idealist and a dreamer. With such I confratern willingly, and to such a one I address this letter.

Now for the bold truth. I too have written a play, in English prose, a Tragodie in seven scenes, together with a Prolog in rhyme and an Epilog in Goethe-ish hexameters. The play is happening in 1914, 1918, 1919, 1924, 1934, 1939, and 1944. It is called *There is No More Home*, and it concerns the lives of refugees as conflicted with the unhappinesses of this war. The hero is a Dutch pilot who is killed in North Africa fighting hand to hand with a Nazi captain with whose wife he has been innocently in love. The heroine is a Czech servant-girl, forced to fly from the Nazis and seeking safety in a respectable hotel near Paddington station. There are also many other characters such as an old Norwegian doctor who has had to fly from Oslo on account of his jewish sympathie. Then an Austrian general of noble origin, wounded in the last war, and now forced to live as a waiter in a café in the Finchley Road. There are much intrigues, and I have

a fine scene when Frau Lili de Kuyper, a Flemish lady who has had to fly from the Nazis in Brussels because she spat upon a portrait of Hitler in a restaurant, hides in her bedroom in Erl's Court several Refugees who have no other logis, including although she knows it not, her own step-son, a Lieutenant in the Yugo-Slav army who has had to fly from the Nazis in Zagreb because he made a purposeful mistake in singing the *Horst Wessel Lied*. In fact my play is full of such excitements. There is a Duel, two fights of Fisticuffs, and a grand climax where all the Refugees speak together in their various languages.

I know you love all good Germans and are fluent in the German tongue. But I address you in English, and ask you to render me the greatest happiness to read my play. I owe much of my fluency in the English to the study of your Works; will you then not oblige me still more by reading and maybe criticising my play? I may give you permission to have it performed, and I have many refugee colleagues who would consent to act. You see this play could not be well acted by the english, because at least twelve important parts are to be spoken in Czech, Norwegian, Flemish, and so on. Will you read my play then? And will you tell me that I may send it? I consent to pay for the Registration.

Yours sincerely and hopefully,

ISOLDE GÄNSEBRUST (*Miss*)

*Feb. 3 Thursday.* Another strenuous day. Wake up feeling I must really collect my thoughts about what new and true things I can find to say to the Charles Lamb Society on Saturday. Realise that a half-hour discourse, which is what they want, means some 4000 words. Also that to-day is my day for the *Sunday Times* article. Start work in bed—no time to waste in getting up. Leo sits at foot, charwoman brings breakfast. In the middle of dictating comes a telegram from Korda, summoning me to Belgrave Place. Jump into some clothes, obey behest, snatch lunch, and back to flat. Abandon Lamb and do two-thirds of *S.T.* article. Then more Lamb. Dash down to Wyndham's for Reginald Beckwith's new play. Sup with Sybil Thorndike and Lewis Casson at the Savoy. Sybil enormously tickled at Ivor Brown's statement that her performance as the mother in *Lottie Dundass* outranges her Medea. I say, "I suppose you could play Mrs Dundass and count the

washing at the same time?" Sybil nods: "I wonder how much Ivor has thought about breath-control." She wants to play Mrs Borkman to Flora Robson's Ella Rentheim. Do I think it a dull play? I say, "Yes. If Ibsen could ever be dull, he was dull there." Lewis is a delightful host who plies you with lots of food and drink, and just the right amount of wise, balanced comment to keep the conversation on an even keel. Back to flat by eleven. Write notice of to-night's play, which completes *S.T.* article. Finish Lamb. Also whiskey. Bed around four.

*Feb. 4* Read and review three novels. As a time-saver *Friday*. pinch a slab out of Hazlitt's essay *On Reading New Books*. Re-write *S.T.* article. Re-write speech on Lamb. Am informed by 'phone that I am making a speech in honour of Keith Douglas at to-morrow's Savage Club luncheon. I say I am speaking in Great Russell Street at 3.15. Joe Batten says, "That's O.K. by us, James. We'll put you on at 2.15." Charming!

*Feb. 5* Both speeches seemed to go off all right. Here is *Saturday*. the end of the one on Lamb:

Let me draw to my conclusion. There is a passage in a play by Allan Monkhouse in which a young sensualist says passionately, "I am not like the things I do." I reserve my greatest respect for the artist who is not like the things he writes. Now let it be granted that Carlyle's estimate of Lamb is, as I began by saying, an eighty-, not a hundred-per-cent. libel. Let us agree that there was a twenty-per-cent. substratum of truth in it. If that be so, then my admiration for Charles is all the greater. For if you feel like Elia and *are* Elia, then, given the trick of words, the Essays follow automatically, and, apart from their verbal jewellery, I see nothing extraordinary about them. But given that Lamb was not Elia, that in fact he was not like the things he wrote—why, then, it seems to me that we are facing something I personally put very much higher—the deliberate, wilful, conscious craftsman. Indeed, I am not at all sure that I have been addressing the right audience. I feel that you are members of a Society for perpetuating the memory not of Charles but of Elia. Indeed, I do not believe

that a Charles Lamb Society exists. The first thing I shall do on leaving this building will be to found one.

*Feb. 6* There is a passage in Balzac's *Les Employés* in which *Sunday*. Poiret, the stupid old Civil Service clerk whom Bixiou delights to mystify, says : " Écoutez, monsieur Bixiou, je n'ai plus que cinq jours et demi à rester dans les bureaux, et je voudrais une fois, une seule fois, avoir le plaisir de vous comprendre ! " And for once in *my* life I should like to understand modern poetry. Here are some lines from a poem called *De Gustibus*, by Bruce Bain :

The whales were waltzing on the shore,  
The dustman gave a shout,  
He said : " I don't approve of life,"  
And slit his veins with a table-knife.

The moral of this poem is that

Man is the lord or louse of life.

And here is something called *Sea Demon*, by Miss Brenda Chamberlain :

Leviathan, over-leaving  
In milk-water gloom  
With monstrous calm ;  
Bulk of fish-glutted belly  
In pastures of the sea ;  
Leviathan, sieving the seas patiently  
For summer plankton,  
He,  
Stench-blower of the ice-pack. . . .

I beg to tell poet and poetess that Lewis Carroll wrote a much funnier poem than both of theirs put together. It was about a walrus and a carpenter.

*Feb. 7* But for a Yorkshire groom who was born well over a *Monday*. hundred years ago I should not have known anything of the sport of showing. In the year 1840 James Taylor, of Pocklington, a poor groom, borrowed from his master the sum of nineteen pounds, wherewith to purchase a chestnut roadster colt foal which had taken his fancy. Too poor to keep the foal, he agreed with some horse-dealers of Givendale to sell them a half-share in it, in return for which they were to keep it until the age of three years. When in three years' time the poor

groom claimed his half of the horse the dealers denied the bargain, and, swearing that Taylor was only their servant, refused to give up the horse or any share of the money it had earned. They then shut up the animal in a barn, which they secured with lock and key. Advised by his lawyer that he must not break a lock, the groom went at dead of night with a friendly bricklayer and removed the window-casement at the back of the barn. Making a slope of litter, he led out the horse, which, to the barn-breaker's horror, promptly emitted a loud neigh. Fortunately the dealers slept on both ears that night, and Taylor got his horse away. After travelling as far as Leicester he boldly took the animal back to Givendale, and was arrested for theft, tried, and acquitted. The horse was then put up to auction and knocked down to Taylor at one hundred and fifty guineas, advanced by the kindly master who had supported him all along. Afterwards known as Taylor's Performer, the horse became the sire of Sir Charles, who begat Denmark, who begat Danegelt. In 1884 the famous mare, Jenny Bother'em, dropped a filly foal, the get of either Denmark or Danegelt—it will never be known which. This foal, which was named Ophelia, became the greatest of all Hackney brood mares. Owned by the Shakespeareanly-minded Frank Batchelor, her offspring were named Lord Hamlet, Rosencrantz, Polonius, Fortinbras, and Ophelia's Daughter Grace. She was also the dam of the greatest of all Hackney sires, Mathias, and I have always regretted that he should be un-Shakespeareanly styled.

Now it may be argued that the Hackney world is a small one. So be it. The fact remains that on a summer's day in 1911 it happened that I drove my little mare Vivianette the twelve miles from Chapel-en-le-Frith to Bakewell for the annual Farmers' Show. It happened also that my little mare was a daughter of Lord Hamlet and therefore granddaughter of Ophelia. It happened too that in the class over fifteen hands was the magnificent goer Haddon Marphil, formerly Wold's Laertes, son of Polonius, and therefore grandson to Ophelia. Earlier in the day I had been greatly moved by the verve and brilliance of William Foster's famous ponies, Mel-Valley's Flame, Mel-Valley's Fame, and Mel-Valley's Fume. And now in Haddon Marphil I was to see how a big horse could go. Later on in the day came the Championship Class, which many thought would

be won by Haddon Marphil. Actually it was won by Mc-Valley's King George, a fifteen-hand gelding by Merry Wildfire and possessed of the knack of wresting championships from his betters. I can see the tussle still, and I remember how that first-class judge, Charles Goodlass, awarded the cup to Mc-Valley's King George. I can still see Foster getting into the buggy, sitting next to Fred Goddard, and being driven round the ring holding the trophy aloft. It was this scene which set up the Hackney fever in my blood.

Why am I bothering about this old stuff now? Because this morning I received a catalogue of the sale of effects belonging to Foster's widow, recently deceased. Among the many cups offered for sale is the one that was waved in the air on that summer afternoon a third of a century ago. Silver is worth 1s. 11d. an ounce. A well-known firm of jewellers telling me that a well-made cup—this one weighs fifteen ounces—may fetch as much as 10s. an ounce, I have sent a telegram to the auctioneer instructing him to go up to a pound an ounce, but not more. Even sentimental values have a limit.

*Feb. 9 An exchange of letters :  
Wednesday.*

At the beginning of your article in yesterday's *Sunday Times* the word "minoperative" appears. I am unable to find this word in the Oxford or any other dictionary. It occurs to me that you *may* mean that fewer plays than usual were produced in the past week. If this is the case, why not say so in decent English? To employ, or still worse to coin, a very unpleasant neologism, of which very few of your readers can even guess the meaning, is an offence to our language.

I would suggest that you read carefully the chapter on "Jargon" in Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's very interesting little book, *The Art of Writing*. In this book "Q" also says that one of the important virtues of a writer is that he should be "perspicuous." Can it be that you are merely a devotee of the Metempsychosis of Obliquity, or of the Apotheosis of Obscurantism?

My reply :

How odd that you should mention *The Art of Writing*. This happens to be my favourite bed-book. But surely

you realise that "Q" took it for granted that a *reader* should be perspicuous. And I should have thought that a very small amount of that quality was needed to tell anybody familiar with the word "magnoperative" the meaning of the word "minoperative."

Has it not occurred to you, my dear sir, that in these days of paper shortage and truncated articles every line saved is a line gained? "Fewer plays than usual were produced this week" is eight words. "Minoperative" is one, *which gives me seven more words to play with*. You say you cannot find "minoperative" in the Oxford or any other dictionary. But you will, my dear sir, you will! Because it meets a need. Because it does something no other single word does. *Because I have used it!*

P.S. What do you think of a notice I saw yesterday in a tailor's shop-window: "Suits de-austerised"?

*Feb. 10* Bertie van Thal is getting more and more like *Thursday*. Tenniel's Dormouse. Showed me his War Diary, pretending that it is modelled on *Ego*. Here is the enchanting beginning:

*May 1, 1941.* The season has opened brilliantly with the death of old Lady Tweedle. . . .

*Feb. 11* Bobby Andrews tells me a new story about Mrs Pat. *Friday.* Terribly bored by an elderly scientist drooling away about ants—"They are wonderful little creatures; they have their own police force and their own army"—she leaned forward and said, with an expression of the utmost interest and in a voice like damson-coloured velvet, "No navy, I suppose?"

*Feb. 12* The "production" at the New Theatre last night *Saturday.* was so excessive that it swamped the play. *Hamlet*, if you please, but with Tony Guthrie and a young man named Bentall substituted for the Prince of Denmark. The fashionable one-set affair, of course. On the left an exiguous battlement. In the centre a huge column of the kind against which the German painter Winterhalter used to pose the young Queen Victoria. On the right a potting-shed to serve as powder-closet for Gertrude and sepulchre for Ophelia.

Up-stage a sloping runway making the whole look like a combination of the old Café Royal and the approach to Liverpool Street Station. The lighting ? Total black-out with stabbings as of jay-walkers' torches held at impermissible angles.

Helpmann began very well. Sitting apart, his head against a piece of Windsor Castle, he was a most heart-taking little figure. And how like Sarah ! The same tousled mop, the same profile, the same collarette, the same provocation, the same elegance. I found myself murmuring with Phèdre :

"Il avait votre port, vos yeux, votre langage."

And yet, just as no one ever accused Sarah of excessive masculinity, so Helpmann was nowhere too feminine ; this was acting on the androgynous plane of pure poetry, as indeed one expected from an artist in the school of Nijinsky. But poetry alone isn't enough ; at least it wasn't last night. I remember Maurice Baring writing somewhere that when Sarah played Hamlet there came a time when the rendering, the language, the very authorship, went to the winds ; you knew only that something invented by one genius was being interpreted by another. Now apply this to last night. Did Helpmann's genius match his author's ? No. Was Helpmann thinking along Shakespeare's lines ? No, he was reciting them. I just didn't believe that the ideas behind the "How all occasions do inform against me" soliloquy emanated from that brain. Or that this Hamlet would have held that colloquy with the Gravedigger. It was à propos of, I think, Frédéric Lemaître that G. H. Lewes expressed his extreme distrust of a French actor whenever he was "profond et rêveur." But the essence of Hamlet is an ingrained melancholy, of which Helpmann gave little sign. He was perky ! Nevertheless, up to the end of Shakespeare's first act—"The time is out of joint"—I found him quite moving. And then the production overwhelmed him. Take the play scene. In this my mind is centred in the growing apprehension of the King and Queen, and I look for the moment when Gertrude's hand steals towards her husband's. How can this happen when they are sitting yards apart, and the Queen is not even looking at the play ? Don't tell me that first-nights at Elsinore were so frequent that Gertrude was bored. She was not a dramatic critic.

The closet scene was just as bad—it didn't seem to me to be happening ; I found myself wondering why it was necessary for Hamlet to traverse the battlements to get to his mother's bedroom. Did my ears dream, or did Hamlet *sing* the lines about " Imperious Cæsar " and so take all the music out of them ? Is it my fancy that in the scene with Osric the honours were with the water-fly ? Why did the umpire in the duel scene bob up and down like a jack-in-the-box ? This may be the right kind of umpiring ; it was the wrong kind of distraction. It is the old story of producers who are not content to be stage managers. Let them take their self-expression somewhere else, out of my way, out of Hamlet's way, out of Shakespeare's way !

#### *Trouvailles*

A French friend of mine, an English scholar, who was a friend of M. Marcel Schwob, the translator of this version of *Hamlet*, assisted at some of the rehearsals, and once or twice, he told me, Sarah Bernhardt consulted him as to the meaning of a passage. He said what he thought, and she answered in a way which showed she had completely misunderstood him, had perhaps not even listened. Then, he said, she went on the stage and played the passage in question, not only as if she understood the words he had explained, but as if she had had access to the inner secrets of the poet's mind. This, again, was an instance of her instinct at work. If you pressed her for a theory about any part or passage she might invent something ready-made to please you, but it would have been an afterthought and not a preconceived plan. She acted by instinct and left the theory to others.

MAURICE BARING, *Punch and Judy*

**Feb. 18** Re-read Maurice Collis's *She Was a Queen*. So many books are good in *their* way ; this one, a romance-fantasy about Burma in the thirteenth century, is good in mine. " Queen Shinshwé never ceased to congratulate herself on the happy chance that had once set her upon the trunk of the King's elephant. Had she not made that climb she might now be approaching the battered and early middle age of the touring actress." Throughout, it is as though Théophile Gautier had collaborated with Evelyn Waugh. The result is that I have spent the day rolling on my tongue names like

Narathitrapaté and Yazathingyan, and fancying myself going down to the theatre on the back of a jewelled elephant, canopied by an umbrella of crimson and gold.

*Feb. 14* Nine-tenths of novel-writing is a waste of time *Monday*, because nine-tenths of novels are written for old ladies in Buxton or Cheltenham sunning themselves in the bow-windows of private hotels with the circulating library's latest novel on their laps. Novels have to be long in order to spare these old ladies the too-frequent trudge to the library. Wherefore the slogan of the popular novelist has come to be : Twaddle to Save Waddle.

*Feb. 16* Lunched with Lilian Braithwaite. I told her my *Wednesday* new Mrs Pat story, and was rewarded with a beauty about a light comedy concerning ladies in distressed circumstances living in a disused railway-carriage. Lilian had a long tirade, and one night in the middle of this Mrs Pat leaned forward and said in a voice which must have been heard in the stalls, "Your eyes are so far apart I should have to take a taxi!" This set up a mood of mischief in me which lasted till tea-time. In this, à propos of the new Jack the Ripper film, I gave *Tatler* readers the reasons for thinking the criminal was Matthew Arnold !

*Feb. 17* The cup arrives. Very handsome. Eight guineas. *Thursday*. Spend a tiring morning being photographed all over my flat for *Picture Post*. "All praise is good," wrote Arnold Bennett. I suppose the same could be said about publicity.

*Feb. 19* The Manchester Central Library having accepted from me, in memory of my brother Edward, the gift of the Clement Scott cutting-book, Jock's and my manuscript of *Gemel in London*, and six volumes of the journals from which *Ego* and *Ego 2* were compiled—all this has inspired Brother Mycroft to look for something of Edward's

that I should like to have. With the result that I received to-day a letter written by him in 1935:

12 *Lynette Avenue*  
*South Side*  
*Clapham Common, S.W.4*

June 4/35

MY DEAR GUSTAVE,

I am overjoyed to hear that you and Mary so relished *The Abbassides*. I thought there was no hope for it (I did send the first three cantos to Faber and Faber, but they returned it), but you and Mary have given me new zest to continue (after having put it aside for 18 months.) So, when you have shown it to various people, please return it, as I wish to start the fifth canto, but cannot do so without knowing what I have said in the first four. I think Edmond Dulac would illustrate it "à ravir."

Now as to some few details as to the author. August von Platen lived from 1796 to 1835, and spent part of his life in Italy and Sicily. He was a master of all poetic forms : antique, oriental, modern. During his lifetime he was never fully recognised as a poet in his own country—somewhat like Chatterton or Landor in ours ; but Goethe said of him that he was a man of great talent who possessed the main qualifications for a good poet. There is, however, I believe, a growing circle of admirers for him in Germany at present ; as there has been in England for Blake. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* talks of "that delightful epic fairytale," meaning our "pome." And it continues : "Platen's odes and sonnets rank among the best classical poems of modern times. He attained an extraordinary mastery of poetic form ; his *Sonnets from Venice* are the finest sonnets in the German tongue." He was a playwright too, and wrote Aristophanic comedies satirizing the so-called "Fate-Tragedies" all in vogue in Germany at that period ; but these are naturally now of periodico-historical interest only.

I have never mentioned Platen again to Jimmie since his criticism of my translation. But nearly every time I see him he never fails to remind me of it. Some time ago I met him. "What book is that you are carrying ?" "*Leviathan*, by Thomas Hobbes." "Never heard of it ! But then," he continued, "you always had the capacity for wading through unreadable books. Must you persist in reading Platen ?" But that's enough of James. I never discuss literature with him now. For one thing, he never gives

you time ; his income and intestines fill his whole life ; for the rest, he is not in my class.

Ever yours,

EDWARD

*Feb. 21* Deciding to give myself a rest—the first for many *Monday*. months—I come down to Brighton on Saturday afternoon and find the Pavilion Hotel maintaining its reputation for hospitality. Am taken by Charles Smith to the Brighton Theatrical Club, where we do a lot of drinking and talking. Spend Sunday morning cutting 10,000 words out of *Ego 6* and reading Hazlitt. Excellent lunch, after which I am persuaded to interview a boy of twenty, Don Sinden, who has been playing in Charles's repertory company. He is the son of a chemist, and according to Charles has some notion of acting. Will I say whether, in my opinion, he should go on the stage or stick to cabinet-making, to which he has already served his apprenticeship ? Murmuring " Stick to your fret-work, young man ! " I prepare to go to sleep. But Charles won't have it, and presently I find myself taking stock of the boy. Enough height, an attractive head, something of the look of young Ainley, a good resonant voice, vowels not common, manner modest yet firm. Straightway and without fuss he gives me a taste of his quality—Wolsey's Farewell—and after a bit I am playing Cromwell ! We then go through Buckingham's last scene, and I find myself suggesting that even the " mirror of all courtesy " can't be supposed to *enjoy* going to the block, that the whole of the " All good people " speech should be spoken in the light of this, and that " Lead on, o' God's name ! " is not a pious command but shows Buckingham at the end of his tether. Afterwards the young man does a scene from *On Approval* quite badly, and I tell him to stick to Shakespeare, beginning at the bottom of the ladder. Which advice may ruin his career ; the giving of it certainly wrecks my afternoon. Washing my hands of him—I will *not* have another protégé—I am settling down for a snooze when Charles comes to tell me that we are starting at once for a camp eleven miles from anywhere to see his production of Coward's *Private Lives*. A perishingly cold night, the last half of the journey accomplished under an arch of searchlights. Fair performance, after

which we bring the company back for supper, and all very jolly and boring, as George Mathew said of Bach's Christmas Oratorio.

*Feb. 28      My letter-bag :*  
*Wednesday.*

1. Card from the Lord Chamberlain, bidding me to an Afternoon Party at Buckingham Palace.

2. Request from the Oxford University Press to be allowed to include two pieces of mine in the forthcoming World's Classics volume, *Specimens of English Dramatic Criticism*. They want my notice of *The Way of the World* and something I wrote in the *Saturday Review* on the death of Marie Lloyd.

3. Letter from New Zealand :

I have been reading *Ego 5* with very great pleasure and interest though I must admit that parts of it are a bit over my head as I have not been in England since 1919, and in any case never mixed much in literary or musical circles. Parts of it are just "tripe," but none the less amusing.

I note that you are now 64 or possibly 65, and I shall be 60 next month. At present my style is a bit cramped. Having been under the weather for some months I was overhauled just before Christmas and at the suggestion of my doctor was X-rayed, with the result that they discovered a bit of metal in my back which the bastards apparently overlooked on the various occasions when they carved me up in 1919 after the last war. Of course the bloody quack is now away on his holidays and I am waiting to see what he is going to do about it when he comes back. I can't move except with the aid of two sticks, hence the time I have had to read and digest your book.

Do you remember Wensleydale and afterwards Codford ? I think it was the 82nd Division ? Do you remember that pleasant inn at Salisbury—the "Haunch of Venison"—where we had some jolly dinners ? The last time I met you was some time in 1916. I was on leave from France and I ran into you one Sunday afternoon in Piccadilly. I remember we adjourned to an interesting little place in Shaftesbury Avenue where they served very good cocktails and which I understand no longer exists. My leave was then just about up, but I asked you to call on my wife, which you very kindly did. You made a great hit with my daughter, then aged about 18 months. She has been in the N.Z.E.F. for the last 2½ years, and before that was in London. Early

in 1939 she called at the last address of yours which I was able to give her, but she wrote that it looked so much like a brothel that she jibbed at going in and so did not see you. . . .

4. Letter from C. B. Fry challenging my Best England Team during the last fifty years. My choice was W. G. Grace (captain), Hayward, K. S. Ranjitsinhji, Hobbs, F. S. Jackson, G. L. Jessop, J. T. Tyldesley, Richardson, Lockwood, Rhodes, Ames. This was identical with the team given by E. H. D. Sewell in his new book *Who's Won the Toss?* except that he left out W. G., as being past his prime, in favour of A. C. MacLaren (captain), and preferred Lilley to Ames. Fry writes :

I'm glad you gave Sewell's book a lift. It's got a lot of stuff in it.

Your team with W. G. vice A. C. MacLaren would have two standby fast bowlers but only one proper slip, Ranji, and three men to hide in the field, W. G., Tom R., and Lockwood.

I'd beat Sewell's team with C. B. F., Sutcliffe, Hammond, Perrin, J. W. Hearne (younger), Ames, F. R. Foster, L. Barnes and R. Peel, Woolley and Braund. The leg-breaks would beat the old brigade in the second innings on the roughed leg-side of the wicket. Foster, Barnes, and Peel would keep them quiet in the first knock. Look up my, Perrin, Sutcliffe, and Hammond's runs *v. fast* bowling.

5. Card from Sophie Tucker in New York, February 2, "With the Compliments of the Season." What season, dear Sophie ?

*Feb. 24*      Sent this telegram to the Editor of the *Radio Thursday Times* :

I see you announce Phyllis Neilson-Terry and Leslie Banks in *Macbeth*. Did you ever see Ellen Terry and Henry Irving in *Hamlet*? Or perhaps you only saw them in *Juliet and Romeo* ?

Your affectionate well-wisher,

JAMES AGATE

*Feb. 25*      Postcard from George Richards :  
*Friday.*

Have you tried this WAY WITH WOMEN NOVELISTS ?  
The novelist is opened, well cleaned and the non-edible

parts removed, then washed and sealed. She should then be rubbed inside and out with common salt (to test whether salt is common or the reverse, place a little on the end of a broomstick, and hold in front of the microphone while the news is being read. If it flinches it is not common ; if it does not, it is not human), and left to hang in a cool place for 24 hours. A mixture is then made of 1 oz. brown sugar and 1 oz. saltpetre, and this is gently rubbed into the novelist. She is then sprinkled with common salt, dredged with black pepper, and allowed to stand for 24 hours more. Finally she is drained and kept in a cool, dry place until needed.

*Feb. 26* Differences, even about the staging of *Hamlet*, are *Saturday*. best composed over the table-cloth. That is why when Tony Guthrie asked me to supper I accepted with alacrity. And then I turned tail. Suppose I lost my temper ? Suppose I were to say things which would leave Tony no possible reply except Damon Runyon's " boff on the beezer " ? I withdrew, therefore. Whereupon Tony writes me this gallant little note :

All right ; no supper.

Any "row" would not have been made by me, for I really would have welcomed your views. I want to know what you propose to substitute for the producer. Some one has to be ultimately responsible for the arrangement of a play. Do you seriously think the leading actor, aided by a stage manager, is the best plan ?

It sticks out in all your writing that your taste is for the virtuoso playing cadenzas ; this is a bit vulgar of you, but the theatre is, admittedly, a vulgar art form. Admitting, then, the propriety of your views, you must surely admit the necessity for a conductor to control the orchestra, if only to enable the maestro to shine. Or do you only want those concertos which "play themselves" ?

Come back on that if you can—and dare.

To which I reply :

Of course, dear Tony, the stage must have a manager. But not in the way an orchestra has a conductor. An orchestral conductor does more than signal to the oboes when to start and to the bassoons when to stop. His job—or what has come, rightly or wrongly, to be his job—is to use the orchestra to give us, if you please, his (the conductor's) interpretation of this or that masterpiece. So

your modern producer uses his company to interpret his view of this or that masterpiece. Now this is all very well when the play is clearly a team-play, say *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. If the producer thinks he can best interpret Shakespeare's woodland comedy by giving the fairies glass noses and sealing-wax ears I do not very much mind, because in this instance the production *is* the play. In any case, I am getting Shakespeare at the familiar one remove, since the rôle normally filled by the self-expressive actor now falls to your self-expressive producer. But I'm horribly annoyed when your highbrow fellow makes a surrealist Lear emerge from a factory chimney wearing a stovepipe hat and using an umbrella to ward off, while apostrophising, the elements what time the Fool and Kent, wearing sou'westers, oilskins, and waders, perch on step-ladders and dress the chimney naval-wise, like the flags of allied nations. What enrages me even more than his insanity is the pitiful ambition of the producer who must add his self-expression to his actor's, and so forces me to get my Shakespeare at two removes.

The fact that I notice scenery, costumes, lighting, grouping, and so on, means that my attention is being diverted from the play. "Go not to my uncle's bed," says Hamlet to his mother. Whereupon one expects your Gertrude to say, "What! And catch my death of cold?" since in this production if she steps out of bed it must be into the middle of an airfield. Then take the play scene, the point of which is to discover whether the King gives himself away or not. Here, if anywhere in Shakespeare, is "some necessary question of the play." Surely all that crowd-management, with the players putting up the mimic stage and courtiers swarming to secure coigns of vantage, gets in the way of the answer? Since you challenge me to say how I would produce this scene I reply: Study the old painting by Maclise and copy that! As for the bedroom scene, all that is wanted is a room with a bed; Euclid's first proposition is not simpler. The best Shakespearean scenery I ever saw was Benson's. I imagine you could have got it all on to one lorry, and the older and shabbier that scenery got, the better.

The dramatic critics of the past made no reference to "production," for the blessed reason that it didn't exist. In the finest single piece of dramatic criticism ever written, Montague's notice of *Richard II*, there is not one word about how the thing was staged. Was Montague blind, then? By no means. Hear him on Poel's production of *Samson Agonistes*, where he tells us that the pyramidal grouping followed "the pattern of the Ansidei Madonna in

the National Gallery, and of the Giorgione altar-piece at Castelfranco." But then Montague knew, and Poel knew, that nobody was going to listen to Milton drooling away without some other entertainment. For Milton, great poet though he was, completely lacked the sense of the stage.

It comes to this, my dear Tony. The greater the play, the less production it will need or stand. What *Hamlet* calls for is a great actor who is also his own stage manager. I wonder what would have happened to the rash, intruding fool who in 1878 had butted in during a rehearsal of the play scene and said, "No, Mr Irving. Get behind Ophelia. You are masking Miss Terry!"

*Feb. 27* Helen Haye told me this good story showing how *Sunday*. an actor who has "got" his audience can do what he likes with them. Old Austin Melford, who held this theory strongly, would go off the stage in *The Silver King* declaiming: "Close those eyes, Geoffrey—close them. Ah, yes, I've murdered him. *What will his aunt in Japan say?*" This is the kind of thing your highbrow producer will never understand.

*Feb. 28* Much moved by Stephen Haggard's *I'll Go to Bed Monday. at Noon.*

Some time in 1930, being introduced to a young man who looked a combination of scarecrow and eaglet, I jumped to the conclusion that he wanted my advice about going on the stage. I said bluntly that six months of the hardest profession in the world must of necessity kill so obvious a weakling. Whereupon the young man stammered something about being already on the stage and having studied three years with the famous producer, Max Reinhardt. Haggard joined the Repertory Theatre at Worthing and acted Raleigh in *Journey's End*. And then, when most young actors, believing themselves to be stars, would go out to conquer the films, he went modestly to the R.A.D.A., and studied for a year. A visit to America was followed by half a dozen London successes. Then the war came, and the young actor joined up and was killed. Stephen saw his two little sons off to America in June 1940, and on returning from Euston, having a presentiment that he would never see them again, wrote them this letter, now

published. I do not think that Haggard was a very good actor. He was a charming *little* actor who could do one thing—nervous emotion—exquisitely. He reminded one of the *ignis fatuus*, the marshy flame which we call will-o'-the-wisp. And of the fineness of his spirit there could be no doubt. He knew how to be gay, and his friends were the richer for his gaiety.

*March 1*     "So the young fellow went back and . . ." A *Wednesday*. perfect anecdote because the teller doesn't bore you with the recital of what, given the end of the story, must be its beginning. The actor-manager's command to his secretary : "Cut the string, cut the play, and then tell me what it's about," is the perfect theatrical bQRST. Perfect because all plays are too long. All films are too long. All novels are too long; one day I shall tear out of my beloved Balzac those dreadful pages about the paper-making and coach-building industries. All oratorios are too long. All German operas are too long—except, of course, for Germans. Wagner, having in *The Ring* one-fourth of what Shakespeare had to say in *Hamlet*, took four times as long to say it. The paying playgoer is normally one to whom the act of playgoing constitutes in itself a pleasurable experience. He finds the lights and the crowd exciting. The intervals entrance him. He is agog for the moment when the curtain shall go up. The professional critic aches for it to come down, longs for release from the witlessness of some empty farce or tedious musical comedy. If only theatre managers would come round after the first act and whisper to one, "Run away if you want to ; we shan't mind." What rapturous notices they would get ! It is having to sit there hour after hour digging one's nails into one's palms that does the mischief. If only dramatic critics were encouraged to go while the going is good !

*March 2*     I break out in a fresh place by sending the *Thursday*. following letter to the Editor of the *Daily Herald* :

That great dramatist Ibsen wrote a masterpiece to prove that nine-tenths of the evil in this world is caused not by men who mean ill but by men who mean too well. Idealists thrusting ideals on people who are not ready for

them. The kind which thinks to civilise the head-hunters of Borneo by bringing them to live in Kensington, where contact with civilised people, etc., etc. (Here insert balderdash *ad lib.*) Now let me ask who, when some landlady objects to having her sideboard decorated with newly severed heads, is more surprised than the idealist? Has he chosen the wrong part of Kensington? Anyhow, better luck next time!

In my diary published before the war I find the following entry for May 8, 1938:

"At Rome last night, after a banquet, Hitler and Mussolini came out on a balcony and were cheered by 500,000 people. Does anybody imagine that, if Germany had won the last war, Neville Chamberlain and Daladier would to-day be allowed to take tea together or address a crowd of even 500 people? . . .

"The grand mistake is the idealist one of believing that human nature is better than it is, or is likely to become better in reckonable time. I have never held a brief for Northcliffe, but he was right when he said, and said often: 'You must watch those Germans. They will cheat you yet!' They have cheated us, and with our connivance!"

Permit me to re-echo that warning. Do not the people of this country realise that every minute spent on making the Beveridge Plan or some variation of it practicable is time thrown away unless we have made the next Goebbels Plan impracticable? After the last war this country sat back and mcssed about with a piece of idealist imbecility called the League of Nations. It disarmed, and watched the Germans start preparing for a new war under the pretence of a Strength through Joy Movement. That was the moment Northcliffe had warned us about. I feel that if he were alive to-day he would be warning us again.

If I were an astute Nazi I should be already organising a Strength through Repentance Movement, in the certain knowledge that some of our highbrow papers and all the intellectual reviews would be tumbling over each other to head a campaign for supplying Germany with all the battleships, U-boats, aeroplanes, and raw materials essential to a change of heart.

I have no doubt whatever that we shall win the second World War. I have equally little doubt that our idealists will hand the Germans the third World War on a silver platter.

*March 8* Have got myself involved in a correspondence with *Friday*. Donald Wolfit. Subject: Can an Actor with a Round Face play Tragedy? Wolfit writes:

Did Duse look like the Lady from the Sea with her snow-white hair and her tired face? Did that grand man Fred Terry, with whom I learned what little I know of my job as a comedian, look like Sir Percy Blakeney with his two gout sticks? Yet how marvellous those players were, and others of the great ones also, because of the spirit that shone through them and out of them, and by means of which they *made* the audience think of them as they intended the character should look. Did that Japanese actor who played at the Globe Theatre in 1930 have anything but a round face when he stumbled over his dead father on the sea-shore? You saw and heard that because I recollect vividly your reactions to it in the foyer in the interval. There was a blubbered mien if you like!

This is a come-back on my remark last Sunday about Wolfit's Othello: "While his accents and gestures are tragic his mien is blubbered." I don't think D. W. can ever be more than a first-rate compromise in rôles of the romantic, melancholy, patrician order; he is too matter-of-fact, jovial, middle-class. All of which grandly suits his Richard III, for which he has the right ogreish quality. He fce-fo-fums to a marvel. He gives Richard the quality that Charles Laughton gave Captain Bligh—a *melodramatic* malevolence, not tragic sinisterhood. I saw Wolfit's performance again during the week, and again nearly jumped out of my seat at the last reiteration of "I am not in the giving vein!" Wolfit has a grand gesture here, whirling Richard's robe about him like a Catherine-wheel made of blood-red suns. He is excellent, too, when at Othello's

Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore,

he replaces Kean's "gouty hobble" by a flying leap *à la Massine*. This is enormously effective. Othello has delivered the "Farewell the tranquil mind!" speech up-stage, wafting his soul toward the tents where reputation lay, and now a single bound brings him to the throat of Iago, down by the foot-lights. All the same, Wolfit's face is and remains too round for Othello. So was Garrick's. That great actor knew that while

he might play the Moor, he could never look it. His rival Quin, asked by a lady how he liked Mr Garrick in *Othello*, replied, "Othello, madam! Psha! No such thing. There was a little black boy, like Pompey, attending there with the tea-kettle, who fretted and fumed about the stage, but I saw no Othello." The allusion, of course, is to the little black boy in Hogarth's *Marriage à la Mode*, then recently published.

*March 4*      These refugees are unsnubbable. Here they are  
*Saturday*.      again. I translate :

*c/o Frau Hilde Kruschen  
24 Woglinda Road, N.W.8*

DEAR MASTER,

As you see, I write to you in my native tongue, knowing your love for that beautiful language, and being better able to express myself than in my halting English.

*Also vorwärts.* I hear that you are invited to produce the wonderful play by my cousin, Frl. Isolde Gänsebrust. This gives me courage to tell you about myself. I have been an opera-singer, and am now an actor. I am forty-seven, dark-haired, vigorous [*rustig*], and in good health. But I have one defect. I am extremely short-sighted, and my myopia is complicated with double astigmatism, so that when I look to the right it seems as though I were looking to the left, and vice versa. This led to disasters even in my earlier days in opera, and on one occasion when I sang "Là ci darem," not to Zerlina but to Masetto, who happened to be standing in the wings, some undesired laughter from the audience did not tend to improve my performance. It was after this that my doctor in Breslau recommended me to wear black spectacles. I wore these during my impersonations of Tamino, Alfredo, Lohengrin, Don José, and Faust. But some critics took exception to this innovation, and I was compelled to cease singing in opera. I then turned to drama, and appeared as Max Piccolomini, Egmont, Peer Gynt, and Romeo, being allowed by all my managements to wear my spectacles. I had also throughout all grown a beard. I performed in Bunzhausen, Gross-Gerstendorf, Gramitz, Müchsenheim, Drogenfels, and many other cities. Then came the Hitler régime, and I had to leave Germany.

Now I am learning English, and therefore ask you to give me letters of introduction to some leading London theatrical managers with a view to engaging me in Shakespeare,

Maeterlinck (*Pelléas*), Rostand (*Cyrano*), and other lovers' parts [*Liebhaberrollen*]. But I must insist on being always allowed to wear my spectacles ; otherwise I should not be able to see whom I was addressing. I could also play Hamlet, Richard II, and Henry V. But on no account could I shave off my beard, this being part of my personality. I have also a pair of spectacles with purple glasses, and when I played L'Aiglon in Grieskirchen the manager considered they suited the rôle better than the black pair.

*Also*, dear Master, hurry up with your recommendations, as Time flies and I find myself getting a little corpulent.

Your respectful

ERASMUS GLOHWURM

*March 6* No time to prepare my speech at the luncheon of Monday. the Column Club, the haunt of the Fleet Street advertising fraternity. I said the first things that came into my head, and it all appeared to go off very well. The members were delighted with something I bagged out of the obituary notices in an august paper a few days ago :

The silver trumpets sounded loud,  
The angels shouted "Come!"  
Opened wide the Golden Gate,  
And in walked Mum!

I repeated this to-night at the Café Royal, and Michael Shepley said, "Out of the 'In Memoriam' column, I suppose ? "

*March 7* Wolfit's Hamlet is a magnificent performance of Tuesday. something else—say Hamlet's elder, stronger-minded brother. There is an almost complete lack of the physical graces. There is very little suggestion of weakness, and Hamlet's reluctance to put paid to his stepfather's account is almost as inexplicable as it would be if Hamlet were a heavyweight boxer or Woolwich Arsenal centre-forward. One feels that this Hamlet turns the verse into what Coleridge called good working poetry, and that the flight of angels who must sing him to his rest are not volunteers but have been detailed for the job. There is no aloofness and little suggestion of the princely ; this is a bourgeois Hamlet. On the other side of the account one must put a complete grasp of a character mapped out as a general maps out a battlefield, enormous

virtuosity of expression and depth of genuine, as opposed to manufactured, passion. I have seen many Hamlets of greater elegance and charm, and I agree that to those who rate the Prince of Denmark according to his pettleness Wolfit must come very low. But this is to take the lap-dog view of Shakespeare's character, and to regard the play enshrining him in the light of that pagoda in which David Copperfield's Dora housed her yapping, snapping Jip. And Shakespeare's play is not a pagoda. It is, as Montague pointed out, a "monstrous Gothic castle of a poem, with its baffled half-lights and glooms." If I must choose a caretaker to show me round I would as soon choose Wolfit as anybody. He puts me back into Shakespeare's day and time. But then I am all for this vein half-way between Mr G. (my private name for John Gielgud) and Tod Slaughter.

The setting at the Scala consisted of a large, open terrace giving on to battlements and the sea, the smaller rooms in the palace being indicated by the letting down of a tapestry and the larger ones by the drawing of curtains. When the cemetery had to be indicated a couple of cypresses were slid into place, and no bones other than Yorick's were made about the portable grave. The most heartening practicality marked the whole production. Lamb tells us about some painting of the heroic son of Nun bidding the sun stand still, that the artist had sunk the miracle into an anecdote of the day, so that the marshalling and landscape of the war became everything, and it took the eye several minutes to discover, among all the soldiery present, *which was Joshua!* So is it with some modern productions of the play scene; so is it not with Wolfit's. Hamlet is plainly visible, in the dead vast and middle of the stage, with his eye on the King and nothing to get in either his or the spectator's line of vision. And so throughout the whole drama, seeing which for the first time an intelligent schoolboy would be able to recount the whole story to his family. Except, of course, why this Hamlet refused to "get on with it."

March 9      I am a great believer in finishing a job. First I Thursday. suggested to D. B. Wyndham Lewis that he should make a book out of his contributions to the *Tatler* and *Bystander*. Second, when he said he was too busy I offered

to make the selections myself. Which I did. Third, I found him a publisher. Fourth, I contributed the Foreword. Fifth, I found him a title. Sixth and lastly, I have to-day reviewed the book in the *Daily Express*.

*March 10* Small, intimate luncheon-party at the Savoy given *Friday*. by the Associated Society of Hellens to the Lunts.

Made a wee speech including something Monckton Hoffe once told me. This is that X, the well-known playwright, is not the author of the famous plays, which are written by his father serving a life-sentence in gaol ! "Actors tell me that when they ask X for permission to change 'but' to 'yet,' or say 'presently' instead of 'in the near future,' X says he will think it over and let them know. Which he invariably does *the day after visiting day* ! "

*March 11* To have too long to prepare a speech is a mistake.

*Saturday.* Twenty-four hours' notice before a luncheon engagement, and forty-eight before a full-dress dinner, is enough. (I prefer ten minutes.) Stanley Rubinstcin told me ten days ago that he should call on me to speak at the Savage Club luncheon to Henry Wood to-day in cclbration of his seventy-fifth birthday. First I prepared an elaborate treatise on the Place of Music in National Life, but tore this up as being better fitted for the Annual Dinner of the Royal College of Music, if they have one. Wrote another long screed on the Musical History of this Country during the Past Fifty Years, but tore this up too, deciding that H. W. must know more about it than I do. Finally I hit on this quotation from Max on Sarah :

The great Sarah—pre-eminently great throughout the past four decades ! My imagination roved back to lose itself in the golden haze of the Second Empire. My imagination roved back to reel at the number of plays that had been written, the number of players whose stars had risen and set, the number of theatres that had been built and theatres that had been demolished, since Sarah's début. The theatrical history of more than forty years lay strewn in the train of that bowing and bright-eyed lady. The applause of innumerable thousands of men and women, now laid in their graves,

was still echoing around her. And still she was bowing, bright-eyed, to fresh applause. The time would come when our noisy hands would be folded and immobile for ever. But, though we should be beneath the grass, Sarah would still be behind the footlights—be bowing, as graciously as ever, to audiences recruited from the ranks of those who are now babes unborn. A marvellous woman! For all the gamut of her experience, she is still lightly triumphant over time.

All, of course, carefully transposed into the key of Music, the Proms, and H. W. But alas, the best-laid schemes, etc. I was just about to get on my feet when H. W. rose to his, and said he had to go! It looks as though I shall have to start a volume of Undelivered Addresses, of which to-day's will be No. 2, the first being the mishap at the dinner to Christiansen recounted in *Ego 6*.

*March 14* At the Café Royal this evening a Young Man—*Tuesday*. Bloomsbury, highbrow, and about twenty-five—planked himself down at my table and said, “In my opinion, Mr Agate, you are a victim of inhibited etiolasis, or frustrated libido. I should like to put that right for you.” I said, “That’s very kind. What will you drink?” He said, “The same as yourself. Two double whiskeys.” One small whiskey being ordered, I said, “What is this thing I am supposed to be suffering from? Is it anything like appendicitis? Do I have to have it out?” He said, “I am perfectly serious. I am always serious. Can you, sir, not be serious too?” I said, “I will try.” And now perhaps it would be better to put the rest of the conversation into dialogue form.

Y. M. We will begin with God.

J. A. If you please.

Y. M. (*polishing his spectacles*). You are familiar with the doctrines of Buddha?

J. A. Alas, no.

Y. M. If you were you would understand that God is a Being so perfect that the idea of evil cannot enter His mind.

J. A. Excuse me, but how can anything which is not in the mind of God be in this world at all?

Y. M. If you had read Persian metaphysics you would

know that evil is a purely human concept like the things you call good—self-control, self-sacrifice, heroism.

J. A. But if good is also a human concept it follows that some human concepts are in God's mind but not others.

Y. M. So you have studied Rießemann's *Biologische Philosophie des Unbewussten*? All the same, you've got his thesis wrong. But why shouldn't you? There are some things it must be difficult for you to understand at your age. Let me make it easy for you. For God I propose to substitute Energy. The initial postulate is: *There Is Only Energy*.

J. A. (*harking back to something he has recently read in a highbrow journal*). You mean Energy as the Over-allness and All-embracingness of All-whatness?

Y. M. (*looking slightly surprised*). Perfectly put. Now, from Energy comes Propagation.

J. A. Meaning sex?

Y. M. Yes and no. You would maintain, I dare say, that Man's life is given up to such things as eating, drinking, sleeping, begetting children, working, whoring, making war, dabbling in the arts, and so forth? And that all these activities are lined up like the brothers and sisters in a genealogical table?

J. A. Roughly speaking, that is my idea.

Y. M. You are wrong. All these activities *except one* are the children of the parent Energy. The exception is the activity you dismiss as begetting children. But the instinct to beget children is coeval and co-equal with Energy. It is Energy, though we thinkers find it convenient to call it Propagational Force.

J. A. It still remains sex.

Y. M. Sex is something invented by Propagational Force as a means of expression. As Pococrates said over two thousand years ago—the business of getting children once accomplished, male and female cease to exist, and the two sexes revert to their primal oneness.

J. A. I should like Mr Curdle to hear that.

Y. M. Who is Mr Curdle?

J. A. He's not here to-night. Please proceed.

Y. M. Now all the other human activities being the children, so to speak, of the Propagational Force, it follows that they must all be what I call propagational and you call sexual. They are, in fact, as much made of sex as a child is made of its father and mother. They can no more help being sexual than water can help being wet. This is called Persistopophysis, and Man is ruled by it from the cradle to the grave.

J. A. ? — ?

Y. M. An old man puts a cigar into his mouth for the same reason that a child sucks its thumb.

J. A. Then when a bank clerk puts a cigarette behind his ear—is that sexual?

Y. M. Most decidedly. He is subconsciously fulfilling a primitive rite which his active consciousness has forgotten.

J. A. Then he doesn't put the cigarette behind his ear because his hands are busy with the ledger, and his mouth is full of penholder?

Y. M. Certainly not.

J. A. Then everything in the world is a part of sex?

Y. M. Everything in the world is a part of the Propagational Force.

J. A. When I listen to the slow movement of the Ninth Symphony is that a part of Propagation?

Y. M. Purely. Music always has an aphrodisiac effect on my nervous system. I invariably get an erotogenic kick out of hearing Ravel's *Bolero*, sometimes three or four kicks. My brother, who was a professor of ethics at Bangkok, has the same experience every time he hears a fugue by Bach. Indeed, he finds the forty-eight quite exhausting. Don't you see that the Choral Symphony has exactly the same effect on you that jitterbugging has on the American Negro? But just as civilisation has imposed a restrictive veneer upon your emotions, so your arts, including music, have long worn a mask which present-day composers, painters, poets, and so forth are beginning to tear off.

J. A. Would you call this mask a veneereal disease?

Y. M. Of course, if you prefer to be flippant . . .

J. A. I apologise. But tell me something. Is this alleged excitatory influence of music the cause of so many young women fainting at the Proms in August? Has the heat nothing to do with it?

Y. M. Nothing. The cause of the fainting is purely erotogenic.

J. A. And when I find delight in Wordsworth's *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*, is that erotogenic, too?

Y. M. Your reactions to the Symphony and the Ode prove propagational affinity between you and their originators.

J. A. Does this nonsense apply to the author of Boswell's *Johnson*?

Y. M. Assuredly.

J. A. And my beloved Miss Mitford? And my adored Amanda Ros? Am I the father, so to speak, of these ladies' unborn children?

Y. M. You are indeed.

J. A. But suppose I don't want to be ?

Y. M. Not wanting is only the obverse form of wanting, as Diodemus of Helicodorus explained to the Roman Emperor who complained of the coldness of his favourite gladiator.

J. A. Then I suppose I must be in love with Mrs Barbauld, Mrs Hemans, Charlotte M. Yonge, and Harriet Martineau, of all of whose detestable works I am unable to read a word ?

Y. M. Why not ? The fact that you mention these writers proves that you are interested in them. And as all interest is propagational, so you must, by logical deduction, be propagationally interested. Whether you are sexually attracted or repelled doesn't matter. The mere fact that you are talking to me shows that you are propagationally interested in me.

J. A. I hope you won't mind my asking, but am I supposed to be propagationally attracted or repelled ?

Y. M. That is not the point.

J. A. But surely if, as I suppose, we are now coming to the matter of my libido . . .

Y. M. Mr Agate, I will be frank. Your mode of living is monastic to the verge of the anchoritic. You've a lot of time to make up, and not much time to make it up in. Better late than never. In other words, why not have your fling ?

J. A. Have you anyone in mind as my co-flinger ?

Y. M. You are not compelled to make hay in the corporeal sense. I want you to indulge in an emotional fling, *in vacuo* as it were. To realise that the orgasm is a human, not a cosmic concept. You remember the writings of Chu Fo Wong, of course ? What, you don't read Chinese ? A pity. The essence of Chu Fo Wong's teaching is : Go to bed cerebrally with everybody in the world, no matter of what sex, colour, status, age, realising that to achieve intellectual bed-hood is to be more in bed than you can ever be in the flesh. Embrace India's untouchables.

J. A. (*deciding that he has heard enough*). Would you terribly mind if I began my supper ? This more than excellent minestrone is getting as cold as your Emperor's gladiator. (*Calling*) Waiter, bring some grated cheese.

Y. M. You make my point for me. The reason you ask for grated cheese is pure fetishistic association-complex. You wish for it because your stomach is propagationally erotogenitised by grated cheese. Good night, sir. *Bon appetit.* (*Bows and withdraws.*)

J. A. !!!!!

March 15 Moths won't eat silk. I made this important discovery on going to my hat-box to fish out my topper for the Royal tea-party. The hat-box is one of those old-fashioned double ones ; I found that the brown bowler that I used to wear at the horse shows had been completely eaten away, whereas the topper was intact. Bought a new tie, the first since the war, and paid the shocking price of 37s. 6d. for it. The morning coat, having made fewer than a dozen public appearances, is still very handsome, and altogether I think I was looking fairly smart when I presented myself at the Palace half an hour too early, Brother Harry having telegraphed from York that on no account was I to forget the occasion or be late. Nobody else in the enormous, empty room except a highly distinguished, ambassadorial personage chatting with some kind of Sultan. Presently an official came up to me and said, "Corps Diplomatique ?" I replied, in equally succinct French, "Non." He said, "Are you British ?" I said, "Gad, sir !" He said, "The other room, if you please." So I went into the other room, which was entirely empty. I had time to admire the furniture, which was magnificent ; but the pictures seemed to me to be staggeringly unworthy of their setting. They were so *conspicuously* faded and unremarkable, though I suppose it would take a David or a Delacroix to make anything really effective out of troops being reviewed. Presently some people that I knew came in—Rebecca West, Irene Vanbrugh, Harriet Cohen, Arnold Bax, A. P. Herbert, a couple of my editors—and I recognised in to-day's party a very gracious gesture to people of my kind, with a sprinkling of the Services. Next I found myself wondering what my feelings would have been if, fifty years ago, I had been granted prevision of this afternoon. What would my kid brother Harry have thought ? This led to a moment of something ridiculously like sentiment. And then we formed up in single file, our cards were taken from us and handed from admiral to general, and general to admiral, five or six in all, till they reached the Lord Chamberlain, who read out our names. The King, who was in naval uniform, asked with enormous charm how I did. The Queen, in dove-grey and wearing pearls, smiled as though she remembered me, while the two princesses shook hands very shyly and prettily. While this was going on, a small band discoursed Haydn and

Mozart, after which we drank tea out of some very beautiful china.

*March 16 My letter-bag :*

*Thursday.*

1. Airgraph from a major in India anxious to know what was "the motif or recurring idea" of Charles Morgan's *The Flashing Stream*. "Is it absolution?" He will have no peace till I let him know.
2. Letter from Hull recalling a conversation in Dr Taylor's house at Ashbourne on the evening of Sunday, September 21, 1777:

JOHNSON. . . . The player only recites.

BOSWELL. . . . Who can repeat Hamlet's soliloquy "To be, or not to be," as Garrick does it?

JOHNSON. Anybody may. Jemmy, there [a boy about eight years old who was in the room], will do it as well in a week.

Do I think Johnson was deliberately pulling Boswell's leg?

3. Letter from Harley Street suggesting that I must be ill:

Take your criticism that Francis Thompson's immortal lyric *The Hound of Heaven* is only a "stained-glass window" in comparison with Wordsworth's *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*. I yield to no one in my admiration of Wordsworth, but both Thompson and Shelley's best lyrics I think outshine those of the Lakeland poet. I have never been truly able to decide between Percy Bysshe and Francis, and as I am a descendant of the former, and the only person (besides an occasional nurse) who sat beside the deathbed of the latter, I think I may fairly claim to have thought a lot about them both.

My replies are:

1. Singleness of Mind.
2. "Very like, very like," as Hamlet says.
3. This letter:

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*

*March 16, 1944*

DEAR SIR,

You may be a descendant of Lord Nelson and have held Lord Kitchener's hand as he went down in the *Hampshire*

and yet know very little of navigation. Besides, you quote me less than perfectly. What I said was that Francis Thompson's poetry bears to the poetry of Wordsworth the same relation that a stained-glass window bears to a field of buttercups and daisies. On reflection I think I was wrong in my comparison of art and Nature. The correct parallel is between Thompson's artifice and Wordsworth's art. Can't you see how in every line and every word Thompson is straining for effect? Whereas in Wordsworth the lines seem to come of themselves. Don't you realise that

Adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears

is not poetry but a perfect description of alcoholic depression and incipient D.T.'s? Can't you see that Thompson's stuff is much too poetic to be poetry? Compare the overworked, over-decorated

Across the margent of the world I fled,  
And troubled the gold gateways of the stars,  
Smiting for shelter on their clangèd bars ;  
Fretted to dulcet jars  
And silvern chatter the pale ports o' the moon

with the sober splendour of

Waters on a starry night  
Are beautiful and fair ;  
The sunshine is a glorious birth ;  
But yet I know, where'er I go,  
That there hath past away a glory from the earth.

I am quite content to rest my view of the matter on Rebecca West, who said to me at the Buckingham Palace tea-party yesterday afternoon: "My dear James, of course you're right. Compared with Wordsworth, Thompson's stuff is pure wedding-cake. The difference between God and Gunter's!"

Yours faithfully,  
JAMES AGATE

*March 18* I seem to have missed a great treat, judging from Saturday. a compilation Leo left on my desk last night. This says that ten minutes after I had gone to the theatre the bell rang. That on opening the door he found five people cluttered together on the landing—to wit, Mesdames Katzengebiss and Gänsebrust, and MM. Bauchpresser, Glohwurm, and an immensely tall, fat, clean-shaven man who was introduced

as "Our new Director, Professor Otto Schweiinvogel." That on his invitation they came in, which took a lot of time owing to the complicated laws of precedence current among German-speaking peoples. A lengthy report of the interview follows. I condense:

The Professor knowing no word of English, practically the whole of the conversation is in German, with the exception of Dr Bauchpresser, who likes to show his fluency. He carries this idiosyncrasy so far that Frl. Gänsebrust, who is very thin and has a violet face like one living in an east wind, has to translate most of his remarks to the Professor, adding, I notice, several bits of her own, including compliments to herself.

After I have got sufficient chairs for them to be seated, Dr Bauchpresser, as spokesman of the party, thus delivers himself:

DR B. For one important reason do we come here. That is, that you shall tell Mr Ar-gutt that we now have formed an intimate theatre in Brondesbury—we are to name it Kammertheater für Deutsche Kunstliebhaber. Here will be performed many of classic and modern pieces of masters under the *talentvollen Regie* of our revered Professor Schweiinvogel, who through the whole civilised world but not in England is, as the greatest Regisseur since Max Reinhardt, known and admired. (*Bows to the Professor, who says testily, "Was sagt er? Was sagt er?" whereupon Frl. Gänsebrust starts translating, which impedes Dr Bauchpresser's oratory so that he is forced to bid the lady to cease.*) First we give in English the new piece of Miss Gänsebrust. In this shall our beloved actress Rika Pfotz play the part of Lili de Kuyper—

FRL. GÄNSEBRUST. I do not approve of Glohwurm for the young Yugoslav lieutenant, Katschka.

HERR GLOHWURM (*decidedly*). I play Katschka. It is a lover's part.

FRL. GÄNSEBRUST. There are two lover's parts.

HERR GLOHWURM. I play them both.

DR B. That is for the Director to decide. After, we play Shakespeare. First, *Romeo und Julia*—

HERR GLOHWURM. I play Romeo.

DR B. (*darting a venomous look at him*). After that, *Der Sturm*—

HERR GLOHWURM. I play Ferdinand.

FRL. KATZENGEBISS. I play Miranda.

L. P. (*interrupting*). I should have thought, Herr Glohwurm, that Prospero—

HERR GLOHWURM (*irate*). Prospero is not a lover's part.

DR B. Excuse me, but these interruptions, at such a moment—

HERR GLOHWURM. Pardon, Herr Doktor. My enthusiasm carries me away.

DR B. (*affably*). *Bitte, bitte*, Herr Kollege. . . . Of Ibsen, *Gespenster*—

HERR GLOHWURM. I play Osvald.

FRL. KATZENGEBISS. I play Regina.

DR B. That is for the Director to decide. (*To L. P.*) You will please tell this what I shall now say to Mr *Ar-gutt*. To these performances we may invite him. But with his *critiques* we will from this time dispense. We need not his *critiques*. We have our own. We have such *Journalisten* as Egon Treip, Heinz Butterbrod, and many others, who will write for our new magazine, *Die Londoner Fackel*. With English critics therefore we dispense. We have seen with reference to the behaviour of Mr *Ar-gutt* how little of interest he has brought to German undertaking. We perhaps send him a free billet. Perhaps not. We need him not, we have already our public. In Swiss Cottage alone a German population of two hundred and forty thousand. And our subscription list is headed by high members of fine society such as the Baron Kretz von Schwerdenau, Bankier Benjamin Israel, General von Schmetterling—

FRL. KATZENGEBISS. Komtesse Irmalina Klotzreimer, Frau Fanni von Steiss—

DR B. And many others. So you now understand why we come here to tell Mr *Ar-gutt* that we are disappointed that he has showed that he cares not for German art, that he has wishes to ignore us, that he has for us no interest. (*To L. P.*) Did you not give him my telephone message? Did you not tell him that as a compliment to this country we shall give in English Pinero's *The Gay Lord Quex*—

HERR GLOHWURM. I play Quex—

DR B. (*irritably*). *Bitte, bitte, lieber Glohewurm*. . . . I have heard Mr *Ar-gutt* has said he will refuse to write a *critique* about this piece in the *Sunday Times*. But from us can you tell him, *Es ist uns egal*. If he comes to see us, *gut*. If he comes not to see us, *auch gut*. We will leave him; such a fate he deserves. And you tell him this, please, every word. *Na, meine Herrschaften, sind Sie fertig?* So. . . . Then we leave. (*They all rise, except Frl. Katzengebiss, still translating to the Professor.*) Come, my colleagues. (*They bow coldly and depart, observing the same elaborate ritual that they did when they entered.*) "Nach Ihnen . . . Aber keine Idee

. . . *Nach Ihnen, verehrter Herr Direktor*" . . . and so forth.)

And Leo adds : " What ill-luck, my dear James, that you were not in to receive these delightful people."

*March 19 A letter :*

*Sunday.*

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*

*March 18th, 1944*

*The Editor*

*The "Daily Telegraph"*

*SIR,*

Like Mr MacColl I too have been subject since boyhood to the disgusting complaint of migraine. Disgusting, but in some ways amusing. In the street I see half of people's faces. At the theatre I see only half an actor or actress, though some cynics have told me that I must not blame migraine for this. Sometimes it is as though I am looking through water; at others I am a privileged spectator at a display of indoor fireworks. The attacks come on at any time and in any place—when I am making or listening to a speech, at a Brains Trust, at a concert, or judging at a horse show. It is most disconcerting when the animal to which I am about to award the first prize completely disappears! I had my first attack when I was seven. I was digging castles in the sand at Llanfairfechan, when half the bathing-vans and all of Penmaenmawr Mountain suddenly vanished. I remember running home in a terrible fright.

May I say that I too am an asthmatic? This wretched complaint leaves me alone in the daytime but fastens on me as soon as I go to bed. My best defence against it is a brand of medicated cigarettes of which I must sometimes smoke three or four during the night. Since they are also a mild narcotic, this means that I often fall asleep while smoking. Fortunately they are of low combustion power, and generally go out after burning a large hole in the bedclothes, or a small one in me. I go in fear of the day, or rather night, when one of them will set fire to the wad of Thermogene with which I can dispense in the winter, but which protects me against our English spring. When this happens you will hear no more from the charred remains of

*Yours faithfully,*

**JAMES AGATE**

March 20 Sent the following :  
Monday.

*To the Editor of the "Radio Times"*

SIR,

I was reading my morning paper over a delicious breakfast of eggless omelette, butterless toast, orangeless marmalade, and sugarless coffee when my eye fell on some words in an article about the Brains Trust : " Nobody can be blamed for talking nonsense in a silly game of snap answers." It was a bitterly cold morning, but I went hot all over at the recollection of my last experience in this kind. Did I know the nature of a thunderbolt ? No, but I extricated myself with something about Pinero's play called *The Thunderbolt*. Could I explain the nature of the Aurora Borealis ? No ; but in my collection of walking-sticks is one that Vesta Tilley used in her song " The Midnight Son." Surely, sir, something must be wrong when what one says doesn't matter so long as one says it glibly ? " The readiness is all," said Hamlet. But I submit that he was thinking of the jump into the next world, and not down some Question-master's throat.

A lady once wrote to William Archer to ask what was the good of novels like Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* and plays like Ibsen's *Little Eyolf*? That canny, dour, and responsible critic replied that he would be puzzled to say off-hand what was " the good of " the *Oedipus* or of *Othello*. Yet give Archer five minutes in which to assemble his theories about tragedy and half an hour in which to put them into 120 words, or one minute's talking, and nobody could have done it better. I am perfectly prepared to explain in six sentences why after the death of Lear we should leave the theatre in a state of exhilaration whereas after seeing a film about Nazi atrocities we leave the cinema in a state of depression. Yet I should require at least half an hour to choose the right six sentences.

There are many questions I should like to ask some eminent men. Let me imagine a Brains Trust composed of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Astronomer Royal, the President of the Psychical Research Society, the President of Our Dumb Friends' League, and the President of the Royal Academy. I should pray His Grace to tell me in what way the Anglican view of heaven differs from the Scotch notion of Sunday afternoon, and whether it is fair to condemn

some dreamy Oriental or full-blooded Turk to so refrigerative an Elysium. The Astronomer Royal would be invited to tell me how, if Time is infinite both ways, we can have arrived at the present moment. I should ask the President of the Psychical Research Society why the dead, communicating with us through mediums, never tell us whether they eat, drink, sleep, laugh, cry, cough, sneeze, blow their noses, sit, stand, loll, wear clothes, shave, and so on, but waste their time and ours babbling how this is Aunt Julia being very happy, especially now her favourite cat has joined her. Will the President tell me why the conversation is always on the intellectual level of to-day's Sarah Gamp and Betsey Prig putting their heads together in the bay-windows of Kensal Green? "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb." I should desire the President of Our Dumb Friends' League to say whether he would countenance such fraternisation, since whatever brings about meekness in the wolf must encourage ferocity in the lamb. Some little time ago I saw a picture by Matisse showing a two-dimensional young woman sitting on a chair, holding a cup to her lips with her elbow resting on the floor. Matisse being a great master, I should insist on the President of the Royal Academy explaining in what way anatomical distortion (*a*) does not matter, (*b*) increases beauty, (*c*) adds significance, and (*d*) what that significance amounts to. Would Mr Munnings give a horse five legs if the extra limb "equated the spatial balance with the rhythmic chiaroscuro"?

There are, I have no doubt, satisfactory answers to all these questions. In fact, I could answer them all myself. But not point-blank. Nor do I believe that any of the distinguished Brains Trustees I have mentioned would be able to think *on the spur of the moment* of the right 120 words. Second thoughts are best. Why, sir, should listeners be fobbed off with first thoughts?

**My PROPOSAL.** That whoever is the first to answer shall have had notice of the question, after which the others may, if they desire, volunteer such impromptu opinions as seem to them to have value. Surely listeners know by this time that the fun of tripping-up a Brains Trustee just doesn't happen. That he can always cloak his ignorance by turning on the taps of mellifluous bosh, personal reminiscence, and more or less apposite anecdote.

Yours faithfully,

JAMES AGATE

*March 27* Fulfilled my engagement to lecture to the young *Monday*, men and women of the Youth Hostel in Camden Town. Sensing early on that they wanted me to talk about the relation of Russian ideology to the British Theatre, I put my foot down firmly, and said they wouldn't hear from me anything later than the death of Macready. After which I proceeded to tell them what I have gleaned of the great actors of the past. How when Garrick played Lear his very stick acted. And how, when in some comedy he came on as a deaf man, somebody in the pit said, " You can see from the fellow's eyes that he can't hear." I spoke for fifty-five minutes ; a lot of it without notes. The audience seemed to be held, and I noticed that the most attentive listeners were the Negroes, of whom there was more than a sprinkling.

*Trouvailles*

Two wee lips like rosebuds,  
Hair like sovereigns new,  
And the little stranger's  
Christian name was Hugh

MARGARET WILSON, *For Memory's Sake*

*March 29* What a pity that G. B. S. is not fifty years younger *Wednesday*. and criticising films, as he would undoubtedly have done if they had existed in his day. With what ferocity would he have fallen upon *The Song of Bernadette* ! The Shaw of twenty years ago would have done even better. He would have given us a play on the little maid of Lourdes. And what about the Preface to that play ? Fifty or sixty pages about Bernadette, another " Galtonic visualiser." Would not Bernadette be told how her " hormones had gone astray, and left her incurably hyperpituitary or hyperadrenal or hysteroid epileptoid or anything but asteroid " ? One of the sisters at the convent tells Bernadette that in a more ruthless age she would have been burnt at the stake for witchcraft. Would it have escaped the author of *St Joan* that on the very day and at the very hour we were listening to this film three women and a man were being tried at the Central Criminal Court under Section 4 of the Witchcraft Act of 1785 ? The old man may not now care to write his play about Lourdes ; what a pity he does not at least

give us the Preface. What a feast it would be both of reason and unreason! What clever differentiation of hocus from pocus, always provided it was not some super-subtle blending of the two! Just as in *St Joan* we read that "Heresy begins with people who are to all appearance better than their neighbours," so in *St Bernadette* we should doubtless be told that faith-healing is born of the desire to heal people more quickly than the laws of normal medicine permit. And just as Shaw's Inquisitor made out a case for the burning of heretics so I feel that G. B. S. would establish the necessity for martyrising the world's Bernadettes. I do not insist on this; you never know which way the Shavian cat will jump.

But of one thing I am certain. This is that Shaw would not forgo his old trick of writing one thing and meaning another. Take this passage in the Preface to *St Joan*:

The penalty of hanging, drawing, and quartering, unmentionable in its details, was abolished so recently that there are men living who have been sentenced to it. We are still flogging criminals, and clamouring for more flogging. Not even the most scusationally frightful of these atrocities inflicted on its victim the misery, degradation, and conscious waste and loss of life suffered in our modern prisons, especially the model ones, without, as far as I can see, rousing any more compunction than the burning of heretics did in the Middle Ages.

Read superficially, this means that things worse than drawing and quartering are going on at Wormwood Scrubs at this very moment. Shaw doesn't believe it. What he is trying to say is that to inflict on one of our modern high-toned burglars and sensitive embezzlers the misery and sense of degradation of being under restraint hurts these delicate creatures more than that little matter of being drawn and quartered annoyed the brutes and clods of the Middle Ages. I can see that scene in the play Shaw is not going to write in which the President of the General Medical Council insists on Bernadette being given twenty years for witch-doctoring on the ground that to hobble about on crutches is to be preferred to the "degradation" of being cured by a quack, and in view of the fact that for every successful unqualified practitioner the world will have to put up with a hundred impostors unpossessed of any kind of skill.

1944]

EGO 7

March 30

Thursday.

*Ibstone House*

*Ibstone*

*Nr. High Wycombe, Bucks*

*March 27th, 1944*

DEAR JAMES,

I have been working hard ever since that Palace party, which I greatly enjoyed. Did it strike you that at last the family which entertained us had, by dint of certain noble efforts, made themselves as civil, as well bred, and as *English* as your parents and mine? I admired the great-grandmother, the grandfather, and the father, with all my heart, but I would not have conceded them *that*. But what a one-sided entertainment—we can only hope that we repaid them, according to the dream-like quality of the afternoon (rather like Drury Lane pantomime seen in childhood, I thought)—

De mon service de vierge  
De ton bonjour d'écolier.

I think Francis Thompson a horrible poet, an artificial flower-maker by temperament, and a *boozed* writer—I don't care where the wine goes so long as it doesn't get into the style—and just look at that passage after "Ah, must—Designer infinite. . . ." The man says he is a piece of charred wood, then makes the assertion that his "freshness spent its wavering shower i' the dust" (what does this mean?). Then his heart is a fount, and his mind a tree, not apparently charred at all, but thoroughly and unpleasantly wet—and the next minute he is a fruit with a rind and a pulp. He should have made up his mind what he was. And then the ascription of disgusting motives to God passes the frontiers of blasphemy. God would not say to any of us, "Alack, thou knowest not how little worthy of any love thou art!" He is the one person conceivable who never could think that—and in that surely lies His Godhead. "Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee save Me, save only Me?" This is the authentic voice of the worm's wife in Nathaniel Gubbins' column. A *low* poem, pawing about the English language, and vulgarising religion. It's odd that Francis Thompson didn't think of another verse where God threatened him with a breach-of-promise case.

My best wishes to you.

Yours ever,

REBECCA WEST

*Trouvailles*

On the first night of *Henri III et sa Cour* the Duc d'Orléans retained the whole of the circle, and stood up, barcheaded, to hear the author's name announced. Dumas' own account of this *première* reads so like a fairy-tale as to have been long suspect. But the testimony of eyewitnesses (e.g., Alphonso Royer and, quite recently, Charles Séchan) have since confirmed it in every particular. The boxes fetched twenty louis apiece. The Malibran could only find a place in the third tier: she was seen leaning right out of her seat, and, to keep herself from falling, holding on to a column with both hands. Victor Hugo and Alfred de Vigny had not been able to get seats; Dumas found room for them in his sister's box.

A. B. WALKLEY, *Playhouse Impressions*

*March 31* Letter to a lady at Slough who has sent me an *Friday*. asbestos jacket to keep me from setting fire to myself in the middle of the night:

DEAR MADAM,

But how very kind people are! I have had scores of letters recommending me this and that remedy for my asthma. But the fact that many people are kind does not affect one's gratitude in the individual case. I am extremely obliged to you, and thank you very much. I think I shall perhaps feel (and look) like the Father in Strindberg's play when his old nurse puts him into the strait-jacket!

On the other hand, perhaps it may not be necessary, at any rate for some time. Summer is coming, and sometimes during the warm weather, but not always, the wretched thing leaves me alone. It has been so bad during the last few months that I have had to have another bed put down in my room so that my friends can enjoy an alternative form of fire-watching, *i.e.*, Agate-watching. When an attack comes on I wake whoever is on duty, and as it only takes some three minutes to smoke an asthma-cigarette, the duty-period does not last long. My friends are extremely noble about this, though I am afraid their sacrifice costs me a great many theatre tickets and little suppers, and makes considerable inroads on my too-small store of whiskey.

I think I shall keep your jacket against the time when all of them, deciding that it is too great a bore, announce that they have relinquished Agate-watching. In any case I

shall certainly be photographed in it. I have been photographed in all kinds of ways. But never, I think, in an asbestos jacket.

Yours sincerely,

JAMES AGATE

April 1      Found this in my letter-box : -  
Saturday.

From "The London Night Light," No. 1, April 1, 1944

### A M A S T E R P I E C E !

A Theater event of the greatest Importanz, the first Performanz of a new Piece, *New Children of Albion*, by our admired Landsmännin and Kollege Isolde Gänsebrust, took place on Wednesday evening at our new Intimat-Theater in Brondesbury.

[Here follows an account of the plot, which shows the authoress to have an imagination gloomier than that of Shakespeare in his "Lear" period.]

The rôle of Betti Tochesa, a Servant, is represented by our honored Opera-singer Greta Goldheimer, and here the Cleverness of our talented Dramatikerin is shown. When in Akt I Antonin Brezka sighs "Oh, Betti, I am so life-tired!" returns Betti: "Dear Herr Professor, what you need is a little Musik," and sets the Gramophone in Aktion. We hear Opening of the *Freischütz* aria "Leise, Leise," and Betti sings. That on the first night our Greta could not keep good measure to the Gramophone shall be given the Fault alone to the Instrument, since Greta sings the Aria not so fast as Hermine Sputa who has made the Rekord. In Akt 2 we have a fine Szene of Tragodie. Ludmilla will shoot herself, Antonin takes from out his Poket a Poisonbottle and threatens it to drink. Now Béla, Ungarisch Offizier and refuge aus Pest, is sad. Says Betti: "What you need is a little Musik" and sings then Queen-of-Night-Aria from *Die Zauberflöte* very fine. But our good Betti makes only a Pause in the Foot-steps of Fate. For now comes a great dramatisch Szene. Ludmilla akkuses Antonin of a Liaison with Laura, and Antonin replis: "And you? And Béla? And the others?" "The others!" shreeks Ludmilla and will take Poison. Antonin takes also Poison with tragisch Meen, but is hindered by Betti, who now with a Pretenz of Gaiety sings Polonaise out of *Mignon*. In Akt 3 Antonin,

Ludmilla, Nabelschlitz, and Laura have fled from the Pension to hide before the Police. They find Protection in the entrance to a Synagog. Behind there holds a Service. Now enters Fr. Süsskuchen with Betti, and Szenes of Jelusy resume themselves. Fr. Süsskuchen who speaks also of Poison, Betti laughs her out, and begins the Rosina-aria out of *Der Barbier von Sevilla*. But she dare not finish. A Marsch is heard. Arrive the Police, led by Béla who points to Antonin. This one shoots himself and falls into the Synagog. The Police shoot and arrest the others, inklusiv some By-passers. Except Betti who, with Tears strangled, will sing "Dich theure Halle!" but at the twentieth bar falls into a Koma. Béla is overpowered with Bites of Konsciencz and decides himself to go over to the Jewish Belief. He treads in the Synagog and we hear the Applaus of the Congregazion. Hereon falls the Kurtin.

The acting is very fine, and of this will I write in our next Number more detailed. For now a few Notes.

Ludmilla (Rika Pfotz) so real, no eye was dry on the faces of the distinguirt Publik. Antonin (Mayer Spitz) indicates by Eloquenz of Hands more than Speech. Béla (Erasmus Glohwurm), actor of devilisch Magnetismus, through his purple-Spektakles sends into all Hearers a Shudder. Simon Salamon very amusing except when he dies. Frau Süsskuchen (Augustine Gottschalk), to the life the Wienese of warm Heart. Laura (Erna Katzengbiss) is not yet rouined, but in her Kostum of green velvet with Malines-lace and a Hat of Straw adornrd with Ostritsch-fetters is an englisch girl to the life, as we should see each day in the fashionabel Streets of Belsize-park.

EGON TREIB

*April 3* The Brains Trust this afternoon consisted of Professor E. N. da C. Andrade, Professor A. L. Goodhart, K.C., Donald McCullough, Diana Spearman, and your humble servant. Question-master and Chairman, Geoffrey Crowther. Two of the questions were sitters as far as I was concerned. "Did the Brains Trust approve of people keeping a diary?" My answer was that if I were to be cast away on a desert island with six books only I would choose six of the world's best diaries. Cheating a little, I said I should have among them Boswell's *Johnson*, which is virtually Johnson's diary kept by Boswell. The other easy one was: "Did the

Brains Trust think that Irving was wrong in being ' always Irving ' ? " I at once reeled off the names of Mathias, Jingle, Louis XI, Dr Primrose, Dubosc, Charles I, Hamlet, Shylock, Robespierre, and Becket. After which I laid it down that a first-class actor always imposes his personality on his parts, whereas the second-rate actor has so little personality that he is compelled to sink what little he has in his characters. Example, Beerböhm Trec. For most of the other questions I found some suitable anecdote. Asked whether I upheld improving the status of domestic servants, I recalled a French farce lasting some forty minutes in which a woman rose from kitchen-maid to parlour-maid, then to housekeeper, then to mistress, and finally to wife. At the fall of the curtain, she shrugged her shoulders and said, " C'est toujours moi qui vide le pot de chambre ! " Which I translated, " And it's still me wot empties the jerry." One opportunity, alas, I missed. Which of our wartime institutions did the Brains Trust think ought to be perpetuated when peace comes ? My answer was : Double Summer Time. I should, of course, have said E.N.S.A. ! ! ! ! !

*April 4* The National Theatre-mongers are at it again, with *Tuesday*. Sydney Carroll at their head. He is advocating a theatre more glorious than Bayreuth, to cost either three-quarters of a million or three millions, I forget which. One of my more horrid nightmares is about a National Theatre. I envisage a gaunt, hideous building, half barracks, half public baths, stuck down in a part of London remote from restaurants and unfriendly of approach. The Director is an amateur who once produced a masque at Slough. The company is dud. The audience is made up of young men in corduroy trousers and the widows of veterinary surgeons. The repertory consists of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, some of the later plays of Priestley, and Shaw's *Jitka's Atonement*. Nothing atones to me for the jitters this nightmare affords ! Why not face the facts ? The British public will put up with Shakespeare in the sense that if it can't get Mr G. in *Richard of Bordeaux* it will go to see him in *Richard II*. (It would doubtless flock to *King Lear* if the chief actor had made a reputation as a crooner or a tight-rope walker.) But apart from the Old Vic there is no audience

*in London for Shakespeare for Shakespeare's sake.* How far, then, is the Government entitled to squander money on play-houses for people who don't want to go to the play? My answer is that I would not spend a penny on putting up a new building. I don't know the age in which Kubla Khan lived, or exactly where Xanadu is supposed to have been situated; but I feel that this is not the time, and that London is not the place for a pleasure-dome as stately as Sydney would decree. We have a magnificent theatre in Drury Lane; why not use it? It is affectionately regarded by the public. It is in the right place. It is not too far east for those who live west, and conversely. It is easy of access from both sides of the river. Taxi-drivers know where it is. It is large. Its acoustics are excellent. It looks and feels like a theatre. So much for London.

Apart from the Old Vic, I have known one other National Theatre in my life. This was Frank Benson's Shakespeare Company. In my view *any truly national theatre must be peripatetic*. I happen to know something about the provincial theatre, and about Manchester, and how that city came by its reputation for culture. In the course of my twenty years in the cotton trade my firm must have sold some two thousand million yards of calico to German Jews who on Thursdays thronged the floor of the Royal Exchange at midday, and at half-past seven the floor of the Free Trade Hall. Yes, the Hallé Concerts which those German Jews supported and guaranteed. Some time in 1907 Miss Horniman took over the Gaiety Theatre, and started a repertory company. Between 1907 and 1915, when I joined up, my records show that she took for her authors Euripides, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Goldsmith, Sheridan, Granville-Barker, Galsworthy, Verhaeren, John Masefield, Stanley Houghton, Allan Monkhouse, and for her players Sybil Thorndike, Irene Ruote, Ada King, Clare Greet, Edyth Goodall, Miss Darragh, Lewis Casson, Milton Rosmer, and Michael Sherbrooke. *Where is that theatre now?* To expect the German community to keep Manchester's drama going as well as its music was asking too much. No, Manchester did not want that kind of theatre. It wanted West End successes a year late. *How much money, then, should the State spend on something the provinces, as exemplified by Manchester,*

*just can't bear it?* The answer is that very little money would be needed, since there exists even in my home town a nucleus of intelligent playgoers. After all, Benson kept himself alive, and Wolfit hasn't starved. A travelling National Theatre will probably return a profit in the big cities. But a man is not necessarily smaller-minded because he lives in a smaller town. Let places of the size of, say, Huntingdon, be visited, so that there is a worth-while theatre within the occasional reach of everybody. And let the State, pocketing profits and making losses good, keep this travelling theatre on an even financial keel.

*April 5      Announcement :*  
*Wednesday.*

*45 Nibelung Road  
Swiss Cottage, N.W.6*

Erasmus Glohwurm and Erna Katzengebiss recommend themselves for Engaged.

*April 6      Here is what I am proposing to write about  
Thursday.    Wolfit's great performance:*

#### EVERY INCH KING LEAR

Years ago Mr Shaw wrote: "With the single exception of Homer, there is no eminent writer, not even Sir Walter Scott, whom I can despise so entirely as I despise Shakespeare when I measure my mind against his." Before going to see *King Lear* the other evening I had another look at Mr Shaw's *Tragedy of an Elderly Gentleman*, and really it seemed to me that Shakespeare didn't come out of the comparison too badly. It has been said that Lear cannot be acted. But can the Elderly Gentleman? Can any actor make anything of

"As President of the Baghdad Historical Society I am in a position to inform you that my Society has printed an *editio princeps* of the works of the father of history, Thucydodotus Macollybuckle. Have you read his account of what was blasphemously called the Perfect City of God, and the attempt made to reproduce it in the northern part of these islands by Jonhobsnoxius, called the Leviathan?"

If this is actable, then taking my cue from the Fool, I'll go to the play at midnight. While Macbeth may be the most difficult character in Shakespeare to interpret, Lear is the most difficult to act. The difference is that between the slow bowler and the fast. Brains will make the one; *fougue* and physique, which are natural gifts and not intellectual attainments, are necessary for the other. To begin with, Lear is not, and never can be, a young man's part. It is not in the nature of things that a young actor, whatever his brains, should be able to body forth the gigantic figure of a Colossus of heathen antiquity. Mr Wolfit has the minimum number of years necessary for the accomplishment of the most tremendous task that can ever confront the player. Let me say straight away that he has enormously improved since he was last seen in the part some fifteen months ago. Of his performance at the St James's I remember saying that he did nothing which we could not explain, and that his playing, while it never failed or flopped, never lit on the floor of magic. Let me now reverse that judgment. On Wednesday evening Mr Wolfit did nothing which one could explain. As for the floor, he opened abysses before our feet. Indeed, I am not sure that there was not occasional question of "amazed and sudden surrender to some stroke of passionate genius." It is certain that the audience surrendered to the stroke of something without quite knowing what. It left the theatre conscious of having been swept off its feet and not bothering to wonder why.

It is the business of the critic not to wonder but to expound. What are the things that we demand from any Lear? First, majesty. Second, that quality which Blake would have recognized as moral grandeur. Third, mind. Fourth, he must be a man and, what is more, a king, in ruins. There must be enough voice to dominate the thunder, and yet it must be a spent voice. Lear must have all of Prospero's "beating mind," but a mind enfeebled like his pulse. The actor must make us feel in the Heath and Hovel Scenes that we are in the presence—*pace* Mr Shaw—of a flaming torch beside which Michael Angelo and Bach are but tapers. The impression may not be correct, but he is not a great actor who does not create it. Mr Wolfit had and was all the things we demand, and created the impression Lear calls for. I say deliberately that his performance on Wednesday was the greatest piece of Shakespearean acting I have seen since I have been privileged to write about the theatre.

I think I was most struck by the extraordinary cohesion of

the whole. It has been said, I forget by what critic, that Shakespeare faltered when he made Lear inveigh at such length and with such vehemence against those sins of the flesh which for some time have not been his concern. Mr Wolfit suggests a possible reason for this. The chain of argument starts when, in reply to Regan's "I am glad to see your highness," Lear has his

If thou shouldst not be glad,  
I would divorce me from thy mother's tomb,  
Sepulchring an adulteress.

Lear is for ever harping on one or other of his daughters, as we know he must. Mr Wolfit makes us feel that behind the obsession of their cruelty is the one possible, unbearable explanation. Lear has only to see Gloucester to say "Goneril, with a white beard!" the train of thought being that

Gloucester's bastard son  
Was kinder to his father than my daughters  
Got 'tween the lawful sheets.

And now into the cracked mind comes the half-thought that perhaps the daughters were not lawfully begotten. From which "To't, luxury, pell-mell!" follows naturally. The point is a small one, but the actor who makes it shows that the matter and impertinency of this great play is of the nature of a chemical combination rather than a mechanical mixture.

There are parts that Mr Wolfit cannot play. He would not, one feels, dream of casting himself for, say, Romeo or Richard II or any rôle which demands extreme physical grace and conspicuous elegance. Indeed, I feel that he plays Hamlet only because no leading actor can afford to bypass the Dane. But let us see what he can, and does, give us in full and overflowing measure—Lear, Othello, Richard III, Shylock, Bottom, Falstaff, not to mention such trifles as Volpone, Giovanni (Ford), and Solness (Ibsen). I feel that this player must now tackle Macbeth. Ellen Terry was accustomed to say: "It is no use an actress wasting her nervous energy battling with her physical attributes. She had much better find a way of employing them as allies." The same goes for actors. If Mr Wolfit's Macbeth is as good as I think it must be, he will wrest that barren sceptre from Mr Gielgud and in exchange surrender Hamlet's golden round. The scenery was bare yet ample, and blessedly there was no nonsense about "production." The company showed fewer weaknesses than usual, though it is still not

strong enough. Mr Richard Goolden was an ingenious and moving Fool; Mr Eric Maxon as Gloucester agonised agreeably; Miss Elizabeth Bayly's Goneril was too light; Miss Ann Chalkley's Regan was too dark—these two should exchange rôles. Miss Iden as the gormless Cordelia couldn't have failed if she had tried. Ellen Terry professed to find something in that annoying young woman; my view is that she put it there.

*Easter Monday.* One of the most remarkable things about French films is the toy-like quality of the scenery. One never quite believes in those streets, shops, roofs, and skylines. Yet these buildings, all of which bear a faint resemblance to the Noah's Ark of the nursery, are the containers of a humanity of the most extraordinary realism. There is no question about these people being alive. Compare your Hollywood settings. There is the authentic Statue of Liberty, and equally, of course, there is the genuine Manhattan outline. One has seen both from the deck of the English boat, and one realises that somebody brought a camera all the way from Hollywood to New York, put out to sea, and photographed both that statue and that outline. There is no doubting the actuality of these hotels, flats, and backstage dressing-rooms in which most of Hollywood's dramas are set. It is the people who are the dummies.

*April 11* My mail:

*Tuesday.*

1. Letter from C. B. Fry:

T.S. "Mercury"  
Hamble

Southampton

10th April, 1944

DEAR JAMES AGATE,

You on Hitler. I don't think he's an Ass—at all. I knew him and had talks with him in Berlin in '34. He was courteous and quiet and a *very* good listener, and a *compact* talker. But he is a *fanatic* like Mohammed—"sword or Koran"—"Germany up in the air—or you out of the way."

He was boss all right in his own house. Then what struck me was that he—like all Germans—had a bit of the brain wanting—a lobe not there—so that he was impermeable to some aspects of reality. He didn't at all understand the English. He was as smart as paint, and very quick in the uptake—bar the lost lobe.

Ribbentrop is a cad and an outsider. He gave me a big dinner—and was rude. I gave him one, and he was a horrid guest.

Yours,  
C. B. F.

2. Letter from Alfred Douglas saying that he finds my article about Bernadette "peculiarly, but typically, revolting."
3. Invitation to lecture at Droitwich. Subject: Infant Welfare.

#### *Trouvailles*

At Marseilles I found a touring operatic company playing *Véronique* in one of the smaller theatres, but the big ones were closed. I was, however, instructed by the hotel-keeper that I must on no account miss an English-speaking film at which apparently one could twist oneself with laughter to the derangement of one's inside. I asked him the name of the film; for a moment he could not remember it. I begged him, however, to have the goodness to bethink himself and jog his so-gracious memory. Finally he did bethink himself, and said that the film was called "Mickey Mouse" (pronounced 'Mikky Moose'). When, later on, I went out he said, "Surtout, monsieur, n'oubliez pas de vous Mickey-Mouser ce soir!"

*From a recently discovered letter written between  
the two wars*

April 12 Have just heard from Albert Throup that in his *Wednesday*. opinion Lady Viking won't be quite good enough for solo harness. I have been fearing this for some time. Her sire was a great horse who won many championships, but to my mind he had nothing beyond his merit to commend him. He lacked the elegance of Field Marshal, the braggadocio of Spotlight. He was too solidly established on the ground to

live in the air. He was, like a great railway engine, correctness itself, whereas the mark of a champion is to do many things so extravagantly right that you don't mind the few things he does a little wrong. When a truly great horse enters the ring the spectator should feel that the sun has come out. With Viking the day was of an even brightness, not brilliant and not overcast. He went about his job with a stolid indifference. Flags, bands, cheers—he heeded them not. He was unmoved and unmoving. Hazlitt, in his *Characteristics*, says:

Even among actors, painters, etc., those who are the most perfect, are not always the most admired. It is those who strike by their inequalities, and whose faults and excellencies keep up a perpetual warfare between the partisans on both sides, that are the most talked of and produce the greatest effect. Nothing is prominent that does not act as a foil to itself. Emery's acting was without a fault. This was all that was ever said about it. His merit was one of those things that nobody insisted on, because it was taken for granted.

Thus Viking. And thus, I am afraid, his daughter. On the other hand Albert thinks she may breed nicely and perhaps do very well indeed in the brood mare class at the National. Have written to him to put her to the horse.

*April 13*      I can understand the value of a diary kept by *Thursday*.      I can appreciate the immense importance of a war diary by the Prime Minister. But I cannot think that the day-to-day surmises and guesses about the war made on insufficient data by the man in the street are of any value at all. I retained in *Ego 5* the entry for June 22, 1941 : "Germany invades Russia. There is talk of Hitler winning in three weeks," as evidence of the utter fatuity of uninformed opinion. And now comes Charles Graves, from whose *Great Days* I cull :

The news from Tunis is still scanty, but the Russians continue to advance on two fronts, and it looks not only as if the trapped divisions in the Don Elbow will be annihilated, but also that Rzhev may fall fairly soon. Darlan has assumed powers as Chief of State. Goodness knows what is to be done about him.

Since we know now what happened to the trapped divisions and to Rzhev, all speculation about them has lost its interest. And what is the point in asking what Goodness proposes to do about Darlan now that Goodness has done it !

*April 14* Lionel Hale having acquired mumps, the B.B.C. *Friday*. have asked me to do his theatre talk for him on Sunday. I don't resent the fact that for the past twelve months they have called to the microphone every other critic except the one who served them faithfully for seven solid years. It may be that I am a back-number; I shall not waste my energy sulking, but shall devote it to proving that I am still eminently listenable-to !

And now I am coming to something that nobody has yet said. This is that what the boys are fighting for is not only this country but everything *in* this country. Which includes the theatre. Is the theatre going to do nothing in return ? Is it just going to hold itself aloof without as much as a thank-you ? I should be ashamed of the theatre if it did. From the moment war was declared Shaftesbury Avenue was faced with the moral obligation to give the troops what they want, and not what highbrows think it would be nice for the troops to want. Now don't let us have any humbug or cant. The majority of the English race has always preferred bad art to good, and it will be a bad day for this country's arms when it doesn't. Say I have to pick three men for some job requiring the highest courage, utter presence of mind, and complete physical and manual fitness. I have two groups of candidates—Tom, Dick, and Harry in one group ; Basil, Alarie, and Cecil make up the other. Tom says his favourite author is James Hadley Chase ; Basil votes for Virginia Woolf. Dick says his favourite poem is "Christmas Day in the Workhouse" ; Alarie insists on Gerard Manley Hopkins's "The Wreck of the *Deutschland*." Harry's favourite tune is "Put your arms around me, honey, hold me tight" ; Cecil plumps for the Fugue in Beethoven's Hammerklavier Sonata. Do I need to tell you which trio I should choose to destroy a machine-gun nest, blow up a dam, or keep alive on a raft ? The theatre must recognise this. I do not think that Tom, Dick, and Harry would thank me for sending them to, say, Shakespeare's *King Lear*. This piece and Donald Wolfit's acting in it combined an evening or two

ago to make up one of the greatest emotional and spiritual experiences of my life. Yet I give you my word that I should not recommend that play to Service men on leave, but would send them rather to some musical comedy, even to *Panama Hattie*. The soldier, the sailor, the airman, and the war-worker—all these are entitled to an escapist theatre, and a theatre that is escapist in their way.

*April 18* Are children's books as good to-day as they were, say, *Tuesday*, fifty or sixty years ago? I have just come across an old and much-loved volume, tattered, and with the title-page and the name of the author missing. It begins :

"What shall we do with ourselves, my dear Stilkin?" exclaimed Count Funnibos, yawning and stretching out his legs and arms, which were of the longest.

"Do! why, travel," answered Baron Stilkin, with a smile on his genial countenance.

"Travel! what for?" asked the count, yawning again.

"To see the world, to be sure," answered the baron.

"The world! why, don't we see it by looking out of the window?" asked the count.

"That's what many people say, and fancy they know the world when they have looked out of their own windows," observed the baron.

"Ah, yes, perhaps you are right: you always are when I happen to be wrong, and you differ from me—unless you are wrong also," replied the count. "What luggage shall we want?"

"Let me see: you have two valises—one will do for you, and the other for me," said the baron. "We shall require a shirt-collar or two, a comb, two pairs of spectacles, and some toothpicks. It might be as well to take an umbrella, in case we should be caught out in the rainy season. You have plenty of money, so you can pay for both of us, which will simplify accounts."

This seems to me to be perfect writing. There is also a formidable creature called Johanna Klack, who is the Count's housekeeper. She tries hard to prevent the pair from going on their travels, and goes so far as to follow them in a small boat. But the skipper of the galiot, equal to this emergency, shouts

to his crew "Boarders! repel boarders!" And gives Johanna a rap on the knuckles with a boat-hook while the ship's boy brings the action to a victorious conclusion with a kettle of boiling water. Now it so happened that my mother had an old nurse who first appeared in her family some time in the 'fifties. One day when my mother and aunt were at school in Heidelberg a woebegone little girl of some sixteen years timidly sought an interview with my grandmother, who was a widow living alone, and asked to be taken on as maid. My grandmother, a rigid disciplinarian, started the sternest of inquisitions. Presently the girl admitted that she was going to have a baby, and didn't know what she was going to do about it. Whercupon my grandmother said in the true Betsey Trotwood manner, "You can't have it in the street, child; so you had better have it here." Old Jane, as we called her, was with my family for over fifty years. She tyrannised over us all, and even my mother was a little afraid of her. She was frequently the subject of conversation between my mother and my aunt, and I noticed that whenever they spoke German the word "Johanna" kept occurring. I asked what it meant, and was told that it was the equivalent of the French "Mon Dieu." It struck me at the time as a little odd that my mother and aunt, who never used the expression "Mon Dieu," should make such frequent use of the alleged German equivalent. But presently I discovered that Johanna was the German for Joan or Jane, and as I was reading *Count Funnibos* at the time it was only natural that Johanna Klack and old Jane should become fused in my mind into the same person. Is there any more to the story? Only this. Old Jane always wore a wedding-ring and her rare letters were always addressed to "Mrs \_\_\_\_," though her husband was as mysterious to us as Betsey Trotwood's husband was to David. Then, one Christmas Eve, a ring came at the front door, which old Jane opened. We children were playing in the hall, and it was an intensely dramatic moment when a huge Petty Officer walked in, threw his arms round old Jane, and said "Mother!" All my childhood's recollections are bound up with the figure of old Jane. Old Jane standing on the doorstep waving us off to our summer holidays. Old Jane welcoming us back a month later with the house smelling excitingly of new paint. Old Jane acting as buffer between the children and parental wrath. She

was succeeded in course of time by our nurse Lizzie, who read *Count Fumibos and Baron Stilkin* to the younger children. She is still very well, and very much alive. And, I am glad to say, still honours the family with her presence. And, we hope, will continue to do so for many years yet.

*April 19* The Lyric, Hammersmith, re-opened to-night. *Wednesday.* The play was an adaptation of Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*. The acting? Alas, within the previous twenty-four hours I had seen a company of French players at the Comedy Theatre in Charles Vildrac's *Le Papierbot Tenacity*. Obviously I didn't expect a faithful reproduction of Zola's play by English actors, any more than I should expect a convincing performance of *Juno and the Paycock* from a company of Eskimos. I looked to find that charming hypocrisy whereby the English explain the sordid in terms of respectability which has somehow slipped. And I found it. Was Flora Robson's Thérèse an Emma Bovary of the gutter without heart, conscience, or soul? Nonsense. Flora had lots of all three, as worn in Kensington. Was old Madame Raquin Zola's avaricious harpy with her fingers so bent with scraping money into the till that she couldn't straighten them? Nothing of the sort. Violet Farebrother made her an old dear, recognisable in Balham. Roy Malcolm's husband had never got nearer Paris than Broadstairs. Michael Golden as the lover? All right, except that he seemed allergic to his mistress. O. B. Clarence's Crivet? Here I change my tune. Whether this exquisite actor pretends to be a clerk in Mincing Lane or "un vieil employé du chemin de fer d'Orléans," Elia or Péechet, doesn't matter to me. But then it wouldn't matter to me if O. B. gave out that he was the Porter in *Macbeth*, or old Hardcastle, or Cayley Drummle, or Shaw's Inquisitor. I know perfection when I see it, and am indifferent to the label.

*April 20* George Black struck a new note in murder to-night *Thursday.* in *The Rest is Silence* at the Prince of Wales's—this was to make parade and spectacle of something essentially intimate. (You could have put a cricket-pitch between the door of Madeline Smith's bedroom and her

dressing-table.) "How now, you secret, black and midnight hag! What is't you did, or didn't do?" is the essential question to be put to any woman suspected of murdering by poison. In Madeleine Smith's case there were five possibilities. (1) There was no arsenic in l'Angelier's cocoa. (2) There was arsenic, and Smith put it there. (3) l'Angelier drank the cocoa knowing Smith had put it there. (4) l'Angelier put it there himself. (5) Being a confirmed arsenic-eater, l'Angelier died of an overdose self-administered after leaving Smith. (No. 5 is, of course, another form of No. 1.) None of these points was raised to-night. Nor had the author made up his mind whether Smith was guilty or not. Now a playwright who dramatises murder *must* make up his mind, because his chief character is two different women according as she is guilty or innocent. Unless, of course, he is a Pirandello and capable of a heroine who is a murderer if you think so, and not if you don't. And to-night's author was no Pirandello. Nicholas Hannen, as Smith's father, recognised the musical-comedy state of affairs and dealt with it as though he had been Bertram Wallis himself. That delightful actor, Martin Walker, wasn't so happy with Minnoch, Smith's elderly fiancé; I thought he was going to make a bolt for it at any moment. What I shall say about Ann Todd and Karel Stepanek on Sunday I haven't the vaguest notion; Smith and l'Angelier were just not there to be acted.

*April 21* Wolfit's manager telephoned me this morning to *Friday*. say that as the result of my *S.T.* article the theatre was sold out for the rest of the season, that D. W. was doing *Lear* again to-night, and would I like to go? I went, and Wolfit made nonsense of my theory that an actor should give as good a performance without an audience as with one: As a result of the full house, and knowing perhaps that Sybil Thorndike, Lewis Casson, and Basil Dean were in front, the old King was tremendously on his toes, though I personally wasn't as much moved as I was ten days ago. But then I didn't expect to be. Took with me an ardent fan of Mr G.'s who regarded the whole affair with cold approval.

April 26 A letter :  
Wednesday.

*Ledbury  
Garratts Lane  
Bansstead*  
April 23rd, 1944

DEAR MR AGATE,

To-day's mistake in French makes the third in recent months.

1. "Mille" meaning thousand does not take an 's.' The translation of "ten thousand copies" is "dix mille exemplaires."

2. "Le son du cornemuse" should have been "de la cornemuse;" this word is feminine.

3. "Vous dites" means "you said," not "you say." "You say" is "vous dites."

Sorry I've forgotten the dates.

Yours pedantically,  
J. H. NEWBOLD

My reply :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*  
26th April, 1944

DEAR SIR,

My secretary is sand-blind, semi-deaf, demi-paralysed, seventy, uncertain of his step, and deprived for long periods of the senses of smell and taste. He is not, alas, dumb ! I cannot do more than take my Zola down from the shelf, and give him the passage to copy. Only yesterday I find him making me write in a film article: "It looked as though Mr Maugham was going to state the case for *patriotism*—except that there is no case." Actually I had dictated "pacifism," and only by a miracle of luck happened on the error. I do not plead remissness in the matters of the extra 's' and the unnecessary accent.

Remains "cornemuse." Odd though it may seem to you, I could not remember the French word for bagpipes *and I do not possess an English-French dictionary*. So I ring up the library at one of my papers, and the following three-cornered conversation ensues, the secretary, one Leo Pavia, grunting from his chair :

J. A. What is the French for bagpipes ?  
LIB. Cornemuse.

J. A. Masculine or feminine ?

LIB. Masculine.

J. A. Are you sure ? Look again.

LIB. It's masculine. There's an 'm' after the word. It says "cornemuse, m."

SEC. (*interrupting*). It doesn't sound right to me.

J. A. Nor to me. But perhaps it's one of those odd French things like calling a cabin-boy "mousse," which looks feminine but is masculine.

SEC. Cabin-boys don't play the bagpipes.

J. A. That's a non-sequitur. Why must you drag in red herrings ?

SEC. The captain wouldn't allow it. Unless, of course, it was a fishing-boat with a Scotch captain, and even then . . .

(*With a scream like the madden'd beach dragged down by the wave J. A. rings off and sets down the offending "du."*)

Yet I submit that reasonable care was taken. But care will not do everything. Caroline Lejeune of the *Observer* tells me that she has had to cease referring to the film *Un Carnet de Bal* because the printer insists on printing *Un Carnet du Bal*.

Since 1921 I have written, including my forty books, seven million words, or very nearly double Balzac's output. And you expect me to see with my own eyes that every 'i' is dotted, and every French accent correct ? My dear sir, your letter is a grotesque and gratuitous impertinence. All the same, I am obliged to you for it. By the way, did you see that a first edition of *The Cloister and the Hearth* fetched £280 at Sotheby's yesterday, doubtless because it contained the sentence : "She threw her face over her apron" ? Now perhaps you can understand why your letter to me is like a rag to a red bull.

Yours sincerely,  
JAMES AGATE

*April 29.* William Roughead says, in his *Trial of Mrs Saturday. M'Lachlan*, that the reason Madeleine Smith had got off five years before was the failure of the prosecution to prove requisite opportunity. Meaning, I suppose, that there was a doubt whether Madeleine did or did not give l'Angelier the famous cup of cocoa. To-day I receive a letter from a Scotch lady saying that a member of her family, a

doctor, passing through Blythswood Square that night on his way to visit a patient who was dying, saw Madeline hand a young man a cup and that he drank from it. The doctor was not called as a witness at the trial and said nothing about the incident till he was on his deathbed. The M'Lachlan case divided Scotland into two groups—those who thought the eighty-seven-year-old James Fleming killed Jessie M'Pherson, and those who believed Jessie M'Lachlan did it. This has always been a favourite case of mine. I don't see how, on the evidence, the old man can be acquitted. As for the woman, that triple blood-stained footmark which fitted exactly, settles her hash; she was an accomplice after the fact. Let us say that Fleming and M'Lachlan between them had a hand and a foot in it! I think, perhaps, that the one part of the world where I should least like to live is that tiny circle having Sauchiehall Street for diameter, within which not only l'Angelier and Jessie M'Pherson, but also Dr Pritchard's victims and Miss Gilchrist were done to death. Remarkable the age to which suspected murderesses live! Madeline Smith was over ninety when she died in 1928. Mrs M'Lachlan, released from prison in October 1877 after serving fifteen years, and being then forty-three, lived for another twenty-two years. Lizzie Borden, the alleged virtuoso with the axe, survived her trial thirty-eight years. The surprising thing to me is the way these wretches manage to keep silence. Madeline Smith, at Rossetti's dinner-table, heard the Maybrick case discussed, and didn't say a word. Lizzie Borden kept equally mum. Surely there must be an enormous temptation to say, at some time or other, "Where the prosecution went wrong . . ."

*May 1* I don't think I am a good Question-master. I talk *Monday*, too much. I promised myself that I would *not* intervene at the Brains Trust session at Croydon to-night, where I was in the chair. Joad, of course, is a practised debater, and though he may sometimes make circles round the point, they are at least circles round the point at issue, and not some other. To-night I just had to put everybody right. One of the questions was: "How would the Brains Trust define a great man?" I was amazed at the

answers, all of which were to the effect that in the opinion of the Brains Trust the only men who could be called great were either *morally* great or men who had made the world happier! Joad said that Napoleon, because of the misery into which he had plunged Europe, was not a great man, whereas Charlie Chaplin, because of the happiness he has brought into the world, is a great man. I wasn't going to stand for this, and recd off as much as I could remember of the last paragraph of Rosebry's *Napoleon: the Last Phase*, which I read twenty-five years ago, and of which the gist is that if Napoleon was not a great man, then the world must find another definition of greatness. I had to intervene again when somebody asked : " If you believe you are a potential Gracie Fields or Sir Thomas Beecham, will you eventually triumph over all obstacles ? " Herc Joad put forward the argument that we hear only of those who have triumphed and not of those who have fallen by the way. That the world is full of mute inglorious Miltons and Hampdens who have never left their villages. In which case, I say that they are not Miltons and not Hampdens. Even if Joad's argument were true—which I don't believe—the proper answer to the question must be that you can be a Fields or a Beecham if you believe you can, *and if you have the talent*. " Talent," of course, means all the many sides of talent; it must include the necessary physical and personal characteristics, and the quality the Romans called *ingenium*, the English for which is " push." No man, with however much belief in himself and with however much talent, can play Lear if he is under five feet high. The question is one which has always interested me very much, and I thought I was justified in giving the good people of Croydon a résumé of something Somerset Maugham said in *The Summing Up*. Most young people, said Willie, can scribble a bit when they are young. If they are unlucky somebody produces their novel or their play, which has a certain success. Which means that they spend the rest of their lives in an agony of frustration trying to force from their brain something that it is not constituted to yield. It was a spur-of-the-moment, free paraphrase, and I ended by saying : " ' It's dogged as does it ' is a motto for industrialists, not for artists. Anybody can sell cocoa or pairs of boots by giving his mind to the selling of cocoa or boots. Nobody can write a play or

compose a symphony merely by trying. If the talent isn't there no amount of belief in oneself will put it there." Yes, I'm afraid I talked a lot too much.

Gwen Chenhalls came down with me, and we had supper afterwards with a man called Balch, who hadn't talked badly. Got home pretty well all in, as I had spent the earlier part of the day reducing the Dreyfus case to 450 words, and recording it for Thursday's "Your Questions Answered" series. \*

*May 2      The Rector Courteous :*  
*Tuesday.*

*Ledbury  
 Garratts Lane  
 Banstead, Surrey*

*April 30th, 1944*

DEAR MR AGATE,

If a shot from my locker can draw such a magnificent broadside, be assured that I shall scrutinise your quotations with ever greater care, in the hope of finding more ammunition. Or should I say, of finding another opportunity to rag the red bull?

My first thought was of remorse. If your man of letters, whom I had foolishly imagined as a merry fellow, going off to work in a galliard and coming home in a coranto, is in truth so beset, bewildered and bedevilled by printers, librarians, and secretaries that he must watch his every word into print with the uneasiness of a cat with kittens; if (I said) your author is so distracted, how shall I harass him further with an absurd insistence on accents, which the compositor treats with so little respect?

Then, in spite of a suspicion that he sometimes does it on purpose—for who that sees an advertisement asking for "a medium-sized hand-operated wench" can believe it an accident?—in spite of this suspicion, there comes a sneaking sympathy with the compositor. After all, is it not very English, this contempt for these damned dots? And is it not perhaps high time that Miss Lejeune ceased referring to *Un Carnet de Bal*?

But that is beside the point. I shall have my eye on your work, just as the *Skibbereen Eagle* had its eye on the Pope, and I shall not be deterred by any consideration for your difficulties, by any compunctions visitings of remorse,

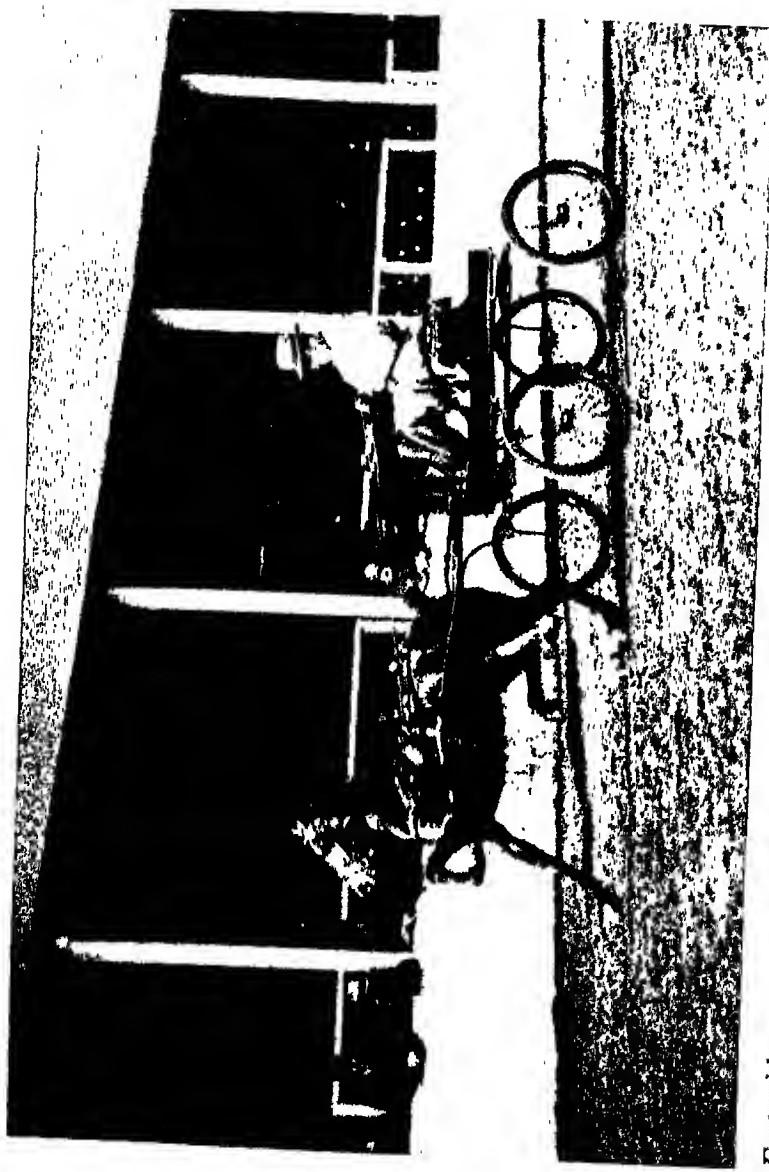
you to be kind enough  
to restate the problem  
at your leisure.

Yours faithfully  
John Forrester

Look here, upon this writing . . .

From the first time that I was told that the covenient, wingless, clogged with mortality 'perambulating about the Café Royal' was the James Agate I have been intrigued by your work, and personality. The problem you set me on such a well-chosen environment (the laboratory, I mean) was worthy of your wit, but the motivating factor behind your personality intrigues me, as a problem, far more; and it is because of this fact that I may appear rather inept at solving or even comprehending a problem which was stated by someone whom, if I may be allowed the impertinence, is to me at least a far more attractive nut to crack.

Photo Sydney W. Newbery



*Easter tide*  
(See p. 133)

nor by any thought of "tout ce qui s'attache à la peau des malheureux gens de lettres."

Yours sincerely,  
J. H. NEWBOLD

May 5      Sent the following letter to Donald Wolfitt :  
*Friday.*

DEAR WOLFITT (let's drop the "Mr"),

Many thanks for your loan of *In Another Woman's Shoes*. You must, of course, send me *The Wooing of Mifanwy* and *The Winning of Gwenora* if ever you come across them. I also will keep a look-out. I particularly like "'£100 is nothing to me !' He made a gesture of disdain, but nevertheless pocketed the cheque."

It occurs to me that you may not know the supreme masterpiece in this genre. This is *Delina Delaney*, by Amanda Ros, first published in 1898, which I send you herewith. It would, I think, dramatise admirably. For Delina I should cast Miss Iden. I don't know any other actress who has "superbly formed eyes of grey-blue, with lightly arched eyebrows and long lashes of that brownish tint which only the lightly tinted skin of an Arctic seal exhibits." In Eric Adeney you have the perfect Lord Gifford "amusing himself with another deeply flavoured cigar and when nearing an inch or so of its death casting it from him." Or else "burying in the silver receptacle that lay by his side the deadened ashes of feathery manufacture produced by the action of his thin lips."

Remains Madam-de-Maine. My choice for this is you.

"Moving over to the great mirrored wardrobe, standing in a triangular corner of the room, Madam-de-Maine halted in horror as its great reflecting door pictured to her the pallid face of fiendish outline she was doomed to wear. In its treacherous curves could be traced the revolting crimes of her past life, the impending approach of a satanic future. Regardless of these reflecting truths, she accomplished her mission. She buried the deadly remnant of her achievement [arsenic] in its corner, closed the door, turned her back on its candid face, as a laugh of victory burst from her polluted lips. She retreated hastily from the room she contaminated with her stained breath, mixing it with the holy and prayerful air that seemed to smother her with its righteous waft. Into the silence of her haunt she sped. Having mastered her manœuvres to

throw guilt on the innocent, she could hardly free herself from a little embarrassment as she tried to satisfactorily harrow the seed she had sown with thoughts and actions of magnified evil. She sat on, cursing the doctor's prolonged presence, wondering, in accents of growling gnash, when he was likely to go."

If your Richard cannot provide you with these "accents of growling gnash" I am a Dutchman, and you are not the actor I take you for. In the matter of make-up I suggest Garrick's Sir John Brute in his impersonation of a woman of the town. Your stage resources would, I think, easily cope with Columba Castle. Whether you would be able to do justice to Clapham Hall is another matter.

"Statues claimed a fair share of space, too, as they stood in martyrdom, sneering at the varying criticisms that passed from the lips of their many shocked admirers, who occasionally visited Lord Gifford. These grand specimens of the sculptor's skill were perfect, both in figure and form, revealing in simple simplicess copied Nature stretched in glorious manhood. Some of them exhibited signs of a much-sought evil; others, shy and calm with hands firmly clasped, kneeling as if offering thanks for only a meagre extension of this so-named trait. 'Good Queen Bess' sat in regal dignity, dressed in a full, flowing robe, apparently horrified at Nature's naked form; while Milton smiled with satisfaction because he was robbed of the pleasure or displeasure of expressing his opinion."

On the other hand, I think that the Scala might be able to manage a grand piano "made by Lee & Sons, Belfast." The book ends, as you will see, with a magnificent trial scene, and I feel that Eric Maxon would do more than justice to "Mr Fitzgeorge, Q.C."

Here's hoping for a happy week-end, and that you won't fall out of bed through laughing.

Yours ever,  
JAMES AGATE

*May 6*            Letter from Brother Mycroft:  
*Saturday.*

14 John Dalton Street  
Manchester 2  
May 5th, 1944

DEAR JIMMIE,

Musical Manchester, or that section of it which attended

the Moiseiwitsch recital on Saturday, including myself, was swept off its feet—no, swept to its feet by a *tour de force* of artistry which will long live in the memory. It brought a fine notice (enclosed) from Granville Hill, a discerning critic still capable of enthusiasms. I once told him that I thought modern music critics looked on their job with the cold-blooded outlook of a police surgeon carrying out an autopsy, and that it was Ernest Newman's fault. His reply was, "The day that music ceases to move me I stop writing about it."

I have long held that of all the nationalities only Russians can be complete interpréters of all the musical cultures. Nothing comes amiss. Other nationals talk glibly enough about music being a universal language knowing no frontiers—but they can't speak it.

I plucked up courage to invade the green-room afterwards to express my thanks, which I fear I did very inadequately. Moiseiwitsch was extremely charming and seemed to know a good deal about the family, mentioning Edward by name. I recalled the delightful portrait of himself and little Boris in *Ego 4*, and ventured to remark on the mature little hands, so like his father's, and looking so much at home on the keys already. He did not seem impressed by the musical environment of an English boys' school. Are we surprised! He promised to tell you that I had spoken to him. If he does, will you convey my thanks again in your inimitably graceful way.

Have I thanked you for *Take It to Bed*? I did, and couldn't put it down. As a rule I just can't stick professional humorists (A. P. H. being an exception), but I just howled at this. It is cumulative in an extraordinary way. How are you?

Yours ever,  
GUSTAVE

*May 7*      Lunched at the Club with Tom Webster, who was in *Sunday*. great form. He described a well-known journalist as "that most unsterling fellow." And later coined a delightful aphorism: "Nothing rolls so far as a penny in church."

#### *Trouvailles*

Crooning has a soothing effect. It would have been good

for Tschaikowsky. He was a nervous man, and all neurotic persons are soothed by the art of the crooner.

FILM CRITIC, *Evening Standard*

*May 8* Albert Throup was thrown out of his trap yesterday *Monday*, and is in hospital with a fractured leg. A great artist with horses; whatever a nagsman can do in the way of coaxing action out of an animal, displaying its qualities and hiding its defects—that Albert does to perfection. I suppose I shall never again know such happy hours as those I spent at Wylde Green before the war, watching the horses at work on that raised plateau. To the left the farmhouse built in Shakespeare's time, to the right and below one the rich Warwickshire plain.

*May 11* A friend has sent me the last photograph ever *Thursday*. taken of Sarah. And I recall the lovely thing Maurice Baring wrote on her death:

The most enduring monuments, the most astounding miracles of beauty achieved by the art and craft of man, are but as flotsam, drifting for a little while upon the stream of Time; and with it now there is a strange russet leaf, the name of Sarah Bernhardt.

*May 12* So enraged by the boredom of Linklater's *Crisis in Friday. Heaven* at the Lyric last night that I had to roll up my sleeves and tackle Sunday's article before I went to bed. Here is the result:

Let us consider bores. Not the real-life article, the button-holer who before your glazed eye unrolls the panorama of his vacant mind. Nor again what Walkley called "enchanting bores." I would discuss, not these nor even the writers of boring plays. My theme is those who in a theatre are bored, and why. Unlike the wireless listener who is bored, the playgoer cannot dismiss boredom by turning a knob. As for the critic, his duty to his paper and his sense of courtesy towards management and players—these have tied him to a stake. He cannot fly, but, bear-like, he must fight the course. (At least Macbeth had the diversion of Macduff's dogs!) The man in the stocks can troll a stave; but woe betide the critic who hums without hawing!

I have decided that the greatest strain is put on the dramatic reporter when he realises that the playwright is addressing not him but another kind of audience. First of all, of whom is any theatre audience made up ? Of 100 per cent. intellectuals ? With apologies to the gallery, no. Is it an uneducated rabble ? The stalls would be annoyed to think so. But somewhere between gods and stalls there must always be a nucleus, indeed a preponderance, of non-culturals to whom the heroes of the antique and near-modern world mean nothing, which heroes must therefore be explained. Linklater begins with Frederick the Great, about whom it must be indicated—for the nucleus has no means of guessing—that this was a King of Prussia who went stamping up and down Europe waving a sword. But why "Great ?" Alas, Linklater has no time to show the element of greatness ; his business is to tell how the silly old man came to be friendly with the cross and tetchy Voltaire. And who, pray, is this Voltaire ? Or is the question : Why was Voltaire's period called the Age of Reason ? Alas, Linklater hasn't the time to give us the essential answers, any more than he has the time to give an uncommonly serious fellow—one Aristophanes, who now bobs up—lines worthy of the writer of antiquity's wittiest comedies. Alas, the old boy is too much preoccupied with the importance of being earnest in the next world to utter a single good thing in this ! We can pass over Abraham Lincoln and Florence Nightingale, since most people have seen plays about both. Helen of Troy is another easy one, because Cochran had a show about her. (Or is the playgoer sure he isn't confusing this lady with Cora Pearl ? Anyhow, he saw Evelyn Laye play both.) Volumnia ? But why should one given to Juno-like lament rant and rave like a First Witch ? Then we have Pushkin, a Russian poet ; Froust, an English poet ; the Vicar of Bray ; Galen, a doctor ; an English soldier ; and one Irene, the daughter of Voltaire and Helen of Troy—in racing parlance, by Reason out of Sex Appeal. She turns out, by the way, to be a fully-fledged policewoman.

Those, then, are the characters in a play about what ? Vaguely peace, and how, when peace comes, the ordinary man will be able to get back to his pub, pint of beer, and game of dominoes, and marry the girl of his choice, and pat the heads of little ones clustering round his knee. In other words, a matter of pushcart rather than Pushkin. Well, some of us have heard this too often to want to spend an evening listening to it all over again. On the other hand, and still constituting myself Linklater's advocate, I recognise a 'twixt-

earth-and-heaven, say Upper Circle, audience, who (a) are thinking in a theatre for the first time, (b) are being made to think in that theatre about peace, and (c) would be incommoded and put out by wit.

As I sat, reprieveless and restless, listening to an argument that would not have taxed the brain of a fourteen-year-old, I found myself, when I was not admiring Dorothy Dickson's beauty, debating three things. *One.* Why the British public invariably mistakes the dull for the profound. *Two.* Why, in a highly distinguished cast, only two actors, Ernest Thesiger and Deering Wells, were witty in themselves. Where, oh where, was Denys Blakelock, the memory of whose Aristophanes in Sherwood's *Acropolis* still makes me laugh? And where was Cecil Troueeer, who, with Thesiger and Anthony Bushell, kept Malvern marvelling at Shaw's terzetto for Newton, Charles, and Kneller? *Three.* Thaekray's lecture needed a piano; Linklater's cried out for full orchestra, principals, chorus, and *corps de ballet*. Offenbach, I reflected, is dead. But why did not Linklater jettison three-fourths of his dialogue, including the blank verse, and offer the remainder as libretto to William Walton in his mood of *Façade*?

The above, which I have somewhat shortened, cost me five hours, and three-quarters of a bottle of whiskey. But I had to do it before I slept.

*May 13 Saturday.* There is a kind of idiot who goes into ecstasies when he discovers a Van Diemen's Land postage-stamp of 1848 with the President's ears the wrong way up. (I have no idea where Van Diemen's Land is or whether it has a President.) But even these imbeciles are not, in my view, so foolish as the man who writes to *The Times* to say that on Wednesday last in the neighbourhood of Kirby Misperton he saw both a hammer-crested ragtag and a yellow-spotted bobtail—events unheard of in May north of the Ouse. *Tawny Pipit*, to-day's film at the Leicester Square Theatre, was made on these lines, and after ten minutes of it I slunk out. Being detected by the management, I said, "Gentlemen, Lady Bracknell held that a girl with a simple, unspoilt nature couldn't be expected to reside in the country. You can't expect a film critic with a simple, unspoilt nature to go bird-nesting." And so escaped. Coming on the top of a film about a lunatic

magistrate who pours glue on to girls' hair to keep them faithful to their sweethearts in the Forces and then goes to confess in Canterbury Cathedral—this one about a couple of peewits was too much.

*May 14* Thirteen years ago to-day I was appointed book *Sunday*. reviewer to the *Daily Express*. Here are a few Trouvailles which I now collect and present :

#### *Thought*

He thought of Maddalan as something definitely confiscated into the cold abyss of his past.

URSULA BLOOM, *Pack Mule*

#### *Hello, there!*

The inner urge could force you to desire physical love in a physical way. It blinded you, deafened you, made you see nothing but the shallow, hazel pools of a woman's eyes, and the red heart of a mouth splashed into the oval of a dusky face. But the others had come along in time.

*Trackless Way*

#### *Nirvana*

Yes, she was sure that he would kiss her! She believed that she would die, but such death would be sweet. It would be like a delicious suffocation, gradually sinking down into kindly, receiving voids, a pain that was pleasurable, a delicious association with a death that had become hypersweet. She danced again with the M.F.H., who, owin' to the redness of the wine, had grown more florid. . . .

*The Pilgrim Soul*

#### *Vase*

Her limbs, white as marble, and not one half-inch of shrivelled flesh upon their loveliness. She had come to him wearing nothing but a pair of black silk stockings, and black kid gloves to match. Strangely ravishing effect, Angèle like that . . . as though she had no limbs . . . just a body, urn-shaped, seductive.

*Ib.*

#### *Jig-saw*

A melancholy gentleman with a walrus moustache proceeded to drape himself about his 'cello, whilst a tall thin

man disposed of his personal attractions to suit the shape of his more exacting double-bass.

*The Pilgrim Soul*

*Tush !*

"Oh, dear Mercy o' Heaven ! " wailed the Lady Mabille. "Ah ! . . . is he . . . hast thou—— ? " "Oh, but perfectly, chère Madame," answered the Vidame, wiping his blade on Lord Brandon's motionless person. "Hélas, it was necessary that I keel the so passionate gentleman."

JEFFERY FARNOL, *Voices from the Dust*

*Felix Einstein-Bartholdy*

Felix had said that a sonata could be written on the room's tempo, whose finale should be a demonstration of relativity. . . .

MARY BUTTS, *Death of Felicity Taverner*

*Fusion*

I have lived with Shakespeare so long, spiritually and mentally, that he has become part of me, and uses my earth-mind whenever he thinks fit.

RUBY MILLER, *Believe Me or Not*

*Obsolete*

The lips, she informed him, were one of the more over-rated zones. The labial caress, though at one time much in favour, was going out of fashion.

DELANO AMES, *Uneasily to Bed*

*Fiddle-de-dee*

She thought she was going to choke as the piano notes mounted higher and higher toward the glorious cadence where her violin should pierce the chords and weave its scarlet thread through the cloth of golden harmony. . . . Once, when she had had tonsils removed, the chloroform had produced a similar effect.

*Ib.*

*Oh !*

Her teeth were vaguely carnivorous.

*Ib.*

*Male*

He lay on one side, resting on his elbow, with her head pillowed against the taut deltoid muscle. He felt manly, strong, as she would have him be. He was suddenly conscious and glad that his old Burberry smelt of sweat and tobacco and rabbit's blood. . . .

DELANO AMES, *Uneasily to Bed*

*Fuss*

When the girl fainted, and the father took to kicking her, the boy ran to the window and screamed, as some jungle animal caught in a trap screams. His eyes crossed suddenly, he foamed at the mouth. Epileptic himself, he shrieked as his epileptic father, married by the Church to a diseased woman, cracked the young head open at the base of the skull with the leg of a chair.

JOAN CONQUEST, *With the Lid Off*

*Catastrophe*

One of the sailors made a grab at her, but she sailed magnificently out of his grasp, bang against the doors that were now on the downward slope of the deck and had not yet been secured. The doors sprang open on her impact and out she went, head over heels into the Gulf of Mexico. . . . One should never be morbid, but there was no point in thinking she was on her way to Kingston.

HUGH BROOKE, *Saturday Island*

*A la Russe*

" I've got about that in a book Lisveta gave me, all about the guillotine, chop, chop, chop. Do you think it hurts awfully to have your head chopped like that ? I mean, if they do it very, very, very quickly ? I should think it's all right if you keep perfectly still, and try to think about something else. I asked Maman, but she didn't know, she's rather ignorant—I expect that's because of being ill all that time. Maman is rather a quiet person, don't you think ? But I think she's pretty, don't you ? Not like Lisveta, but pretty, and softer, and she smells more ordinary. I don't mean like Bajouska, she smells too ordinary. Maman comes in between—I think that's satisfactory, don't you think so ? "

R. C. HUTCHINSON, *Testament*

*Highbrow*

His even more extraordinary and almost prehensile legs were to be observed, curling up above the level of his head as he sat in a theatre, eccentrically isolated from everything.

G. U. ELLIS, *Twilight on Parnassus*

*Proverb*

A terrible expression of familiarity, caught in the very act of breeding contempt, came over the slavey's face.

HAMISH MACLAREN, *Cockalorum*

*Criterion*

If some devastating power could destroy the earth but had decided to save one man for his tenderness of heart and his fineness of character and his splendid face, he would have chosen Harry Payne Whitney. It was said that he was one of the few men in America who could put his hand on five million in cash at an hour's notice.

GLORIA MORGAN VANDERBILT, *Without Prejudice*

*May 15* The B.B.C. rang up at eleven this morning to say that *Monday*. Martin-Harvey had died. Would I let them have 150 words for the one o'clock bulletin? I said no. But that they could have 400 words, provided I delivered them myself. They agreed, and this is what I broadcast:

When Irving died, his mantle, which no single actor might wear, descended upon two players: Forbes-Robertson and Martin-Harvey. Serving his apprenticeship at the Lyceum, Harvey was brought up literally at Irving's knee, and he would always have been proud if, at his best, one had said of him that he was knee-high to Irving. When at Golder's Green the curtain fell on the revival of *The Lyons Mail*—in which play, following Irving's example, he played the dual roles of Lesurques and Dubosc—at the fall of the curtain Harvey came forward and said: "Everything I do in this famous old piece I learned from my great master. With every fibre of my being I ask you to believe that my performance is not a patch on his."

He was a great little actor in the more wistful kinds of melodrama, wonderful on the steps of a scaffold, and possessed in *The Only Way* of enough pathos to draw tears from an

audience of tailors' dummies. But Nature had not given him the physical attributes essential to the great actor; the mould in which she made him was too small. Realising this, Martin-Harvey determined to be the best purveyor of romantic entertainment *with something in reserve*. Thus it was that throughout his career the tradesman was doubled with the artist. The time arriving when the artist-urge was not to be resisted, it was then that we saw some of the most exquisite things that have happened in the theatre of the last forty years. Among these were his Pelleas to the Mélisande of Mrs Patrick Campbell, and his Burgomaster in Maeterlinck's war-play. I shall never forget the beauty and humility of his "There is nothing of the hero about me. Like other men, I fear death. I should like to end my life calmly; but, even so, I want to end it decently." And then there was the lovely performance in Hoffmannsthal's version of *Everyman*. At the start Harvey gave Everyman a voice he did not often use—high-pitched and clarion like some golden gong. But by the time the end was reached the figure of Everyman had put on what Cardinal Newman calls "an inexpressive lightness and sense of freedom," and it was here that the actor's spirit most shone through him.

One word more. In view of Harvey's passionate attachment to his great predecessor, I must think now of the lines spoken by Kent at the end of *King Lear*:

I have a journey, sir, shortly to go;  
My master calls me, I must not say no.

John Martin-Harvey has gone to join his old master.

*May 17*      Martin-Harvey's funeral at East Sheen. Was *Wednesday*. shocked and grieved to find nobody there I knew. Not an actor, not a critic. Only Jack's chauffeur, who drove me twenty years ago and still remembered me. Spent the rest of to-day writing the following for Sunday's *S.T.* These things must be done when the fit is on.

"Every manager of spirit," says Montague, "seems to need a *Beaucaire* or two for his stand-by. . . . Irving, when we fainted with excess of masterpieces, gave us *Faust* and *Ravenswood*." Forbes-Robertson, when he thought the provinces would not stand for Hamlet, Romeo, Othello, Macbeth, Henry Arthur Jones's Michael and Pinero's Lucas Cleeve,

Shaw's Caesar and Dick Dudgeon, gave us *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*. There have been actors, of course, who have allowed the stand-by to become staple diet. It is the old story of the artistic conscience. The actor who is burdened with this will not be content to steep his soul in rubbish; it is your happy, compunctionless fellow who asks for nothing better than to stick his nose in the trough, and wave his legs in the air.

That good actor and fine spirit, John Martin-Harvey, whose death last week has grieved thousands, put this to me very succinctly one summer afternoon in his pretty garden at Sheen. He said, as nearly as I can remember: "Even star actors have families. The first duty of an actor who is not alone in the world is to put by a minimum sum against railway accidents and rainy days. His next duty is to defend that sum by appearing in the provinces and in popular plays. Why should I play Hamlet at £28 a night in London when the average provincial receipts for *Hamlet* are £177? Why should I inflict my Richard and my Oedipus on audiences clamouring for Sydney Carton and Lieutenant Reresby? At the same time every actor who loves his art admits the moral obligation to defy the box-office from time to time, and produce the worth-while play." It was a Sunday, and I remember that we sat on into the gloaming, and presently went in to a candle-lit supper under the gracious presidency of his talented lady. Here Jack showed a glimpse of another side to his character—his sense of fun. Pointing to two rich, and, indeed, over-ornate street lamps which stood at the foot of the staircase, he said that the bric-à-brac dealer had guaranteed them to have come direct from the Vedramini Palace on the Grand Canal. "I did not tell him," said Jack, "that I recognised them as part of my production of *Othello*!"

Sydney Carton's words on the scaffold having passed into the language to the point at which they have become a standing joke, it would be idle to pretend that *The Only Way* is not the piece by which Martin-Harvey will be most generally remembered. And indeed there were beautiful things in it, including the scene in which Carton disclosed his intended self-sacrifice. This was a little backwater more deeply moving than the ostensible torrent to come. He was a master of reticence and spiritual melancholy. I remember slipping away from a Richter concert at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, to catch a glimpse of the last act of his *Hamlet*. It may well be that, as W. B. Yeats said, he delivered the "O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!" soliloquy

"like a rabbit with a thunderbolt tied to its tail." Of his delivery of the "If it be now" speech I can only say that I have never heard words more beautifully spoken. There was about Harvey a wistfulness, a feyness, a power of appearing translated which Mrs Patrick Campbell put into her own language when, meeting him about to go on as Pelléas, luminous and unbodied, she widened her eyes and said, "You look like a great moth!" Pelléas told me this, sitting in that garden. He added with mock seriousness, "I owed everything in that part to my wig, which was made out of the hair which grows on the breast of the Tibetan yak!"

He should, of course, have played *Everyman* in the original. Soon after the last war he appeared in a re-translation of the German version of that masterpiece, which he filled with something of Elgar's *Gerontius* quality. His acting, when *Everyman* was near to dying, had the hushed sweetness of that opening to the second part, so that one was reminded of the theme which symbolises purification by the waters of Purgatory : "Softly and gently, dearly ransomed Soul." In Germany *Everyman* was played by a bull-necked Teuton. He would be. Harvey was all spirit, and when, at the end, the hooded figure of Death held forth his shadowy yet certain arms, it was a very pitiful, child-like figure they enclosed. In later life his best performance was that of the Burgomaster in Maeterlinck's play. I remember asking him why he held his four fingers as though they were stuck together, with the thumb a little apart. He said that he had observed this to be a characteristic of simple-minded persons, and that he wished to show the Burgomaster as heroic in his utter simplicity.

In the matter of physical qualifications Harvey had voice, mobile and expressive features, and a command of gesture. Alas, his own disposition tended to infuse something too much of the milk of human kindness into his acting, with the result that the full expression of malignity, envy, hate, and the viler passions was denied him. Was he a great actor? Perhaps not. Was he in the grand succession? Undoubtedly. Was he a great romantic with power to sway a crowded house? Ask those who saw him at his best! He went straight to the heart of his audience; he always moved me profoundly. And he had one quality with which your world-shaker may make shift to dispense, but which is the basis of a great spirit. This is the power to postulate a world in which the standard of human thought and action is noble. The mean and the shoddy could not breathe his air. Some

have called this urbanity : I should like to call it poetry. Harvey's world was noble, urbane, and poetical. "To the young men and women of his day he was an intoxication and a passion, awakening half-formed desires, hidden longings and impulses, and secret enthusiasms. . . ." That which was written of Swinburne may be fittingly said of the actor to whom we are saying good-bye. He was eighty, he had laboured for more than sixty years at the work nearest his heart, his reach blessedly exceeded his grasp, he brought happiness to two generations, he was beloved, and is gone. There is nothing here but what may quiet us.

*May 18* Holding forth to-night at the Café Royal on the *Thursday*. subject of Simultaneity, a bearded fellow laid it down that the only really simultaneous events are events occurring at the same place.

In other words, I cannot strike a match to light my pipe in London at the same instant of time in which Joe Louis knocks out the British challenger at Chicago, meaning I cannot do it simultaneously with Joe, nor he with me. But can we both do it simultaneously relative to an observer on a ship at a point in mid-Atlantic equidistant from us both ? I take it that what is wrong is not the fact of simultaneity but the impossibility of defining it in words. Of course two things can't happen at the same moment if the moment wobbles about and isn't on hand when it's wanted. Suppose I am in Chicago and see Joe deliver the blow ? Even so I must allow for the time the blow takes to travel from the ring to my retina. Say that is  $1/2,000,000$ th part of a second. Then surely whatever I was seeing  $1/2,000,000$ th part of a second before I thought I saw Louis deliver his punch happened simultaneously with that punch ? Or isn't even this true in theory ?

In the meantime—and let me assure Max that a meantime is something vastly more complex than his " pale platitude "—I propound a new theory. Let me start from the position that the only really simultaneous events are events occurring at the same place. This is the same as saying that things occurring at different places cannot be simultaneous. In other words: the fact that things occur at different places prevents them from being together in time. Wherefore, since what is sauce for the time-goose is presumably sauce for the place-gander, I deduce :

the fact that things occur at different times prevents them from being together in place. From which it follows that, since the kings of England have not been crowned simultaneously, they cannot have been crowned in Westminster Abbey. Which sounds absurd. But let us be careful. Obviously the English kings have not been crowned simultaneously. Equally obviously they have not been crowned in the same place, since Westminster Abbey is not the same place two seconds together except relative to the rest of this globe, which as a whole gallivants about the universe but remains stationary as between its parts. From all of which it would seem that the bearded fellow's theory is pretty sound, given that there is neither space nor time, but only space-time. What worries me is that credit for this is not given where it properly belongs—to Mr Curdle, first in the field with his discovery of "universal dovetailedness with regard to place and time—a sort of a general oneness." Incidentally, if I don't stop here I shall be late for the theatre, which would, I suppose, be wrong. But can I help it if my amateur metaphysics amuse me more than somebody's professional comedy ? The first is an intellectual exercise ; nine times out of ten the second is not.

*May 19* I believe in getting things straight, which is the *Friday*. reason for this letter to Alan Dent. I should have written "Jock" were it not that this is the first time he makes serious appearance in this volume.

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*

*May 10th, 1944*

DEAR JOCK,

In your letter to Stanley Rubinstein acknowledging the cheque for your share in *Gemel* I notice a curious phrase: "Will you please convey to Mr Agate my thanks and unaltered regards." But has not something altered, and altered a great deal ? Other friends of yours, Hamish Hamilton and the Oliviers, for example, have heard from you. Were these, perhaps, purely business letters ? But last night Mr G. showed me your note written from hospital and telling him about your accident of some weeks ago, of which I heard only in the most roundabout way. Second count in the

indictment. In what is now five months you have not written me once, with the exception of a postcard three days after you joined up, advising me of your broadcast. Third count. When you were on leave you neither came near me, nor did you 'phone.

In what way have I offended? Was it because I didn't throw a farewell party for you? I can only say that the idea crossed my mind, but that I rejected it because I thought that an "Alan's Abschied" would not be to your taste, and that you would rather slip away *sans* fuss. I told you, moreover, that if you meditated a series of letters to be made into a book—as I did with Allan Monkhouse in *L. of C.*—I would keep them safely for you, market them, write a preface or abstain from writing one, and *restrain from printing so much as one syllable in "Ego"* without your permission. I made excuses for you. I imputed to you the notion of causing more stir by making no noise, though I abandoned this as worthy of me but not of you. Next I thought you might, like Rimbaud, be purposely turning your back on your career as man of letters, with the notion that you might find it easier to scrub decks, or peel potatoes, or whatever it is you do, if you waved a lily hand and bade us a sailor's farewell. But all this was sheer conjecture, and you did not give me one hint. There are some things I can understand, and this is not one of them. Perhaps you have a reason for dissembling your love; it is uncommonly like kicking your old friend downstairs.

A brainwave. *Did you expect me to write first?* But does one write to an explorer for news? One sits at home and waits. Even so, I have written first, and shall expect an answer worthy of the sender. Or none. For I can conceive yet another possible mood. You may be saying, "A worm has begun to eat its way into our friendship," or, "A damnable constraint has set in and is acting like a wasting disease." In that case, Jock, I say, "Let us make up our minds to have no slow bleeding-to-death of our friendship. We'll end a pleasant chapter here to-night." And, wiping the corners of my eyes with a clean handkerchief, I conclude, "It is possible that we shall come together again. But if this is not to be, let us not wear hypocritical faces, and suffer and be wretched."

Unless your mind has had all the literary sense knocked out of it by davits, belaying-pins, or your accident, you will recognise the conversation at the dinner-party at which Aubrey Tanqueray gave notice of his impending marriage. By the way, somebody sent me this morning a charming



*Photo John Pickers*

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*Laurence Olivier as Richard III*  
(See p. 192)



*Pamela Brown*

(See p. 142)

*Photo Tunbridge-Sedgwick*

1944]

EGO 7

drawing of Pinero as he appeared on the stage in 1881. It seems almost as long since I heard from you.

Ever your  
JAMIE

P.S. "It never does to neglect Johnson." I cull from a letter to Boswell :

"I find you have taken one of your fits of taciturnity, and have resolved not to write till you are written to : it is but a peevish humour, but you shall have your way. . . . In the mean time let us play no trick, but keep each other's kindness by all means in our power. . . ."

May 20      Letter from John Byron :  
*Saturday.*

*Memorial Theatre  
Stratford-on-Avon*

*May 19th, 1944*

MY DEAR JAMES,

My thanks to you for your wire wishing me good luck for *Hamlet*—I could not have been more delighted and surprised if I had had one from W. S. himself. The first night was exciting (for me, at any rate!), and I hope you will see me have a shot at *Hamlet* when I've done a lot more work on it (or should I say "him"?).

We rehearse all and every day and are exhausted. It's hard work, but invaluable experience being bundled from play to play. The other day I had a rehearsal of *Mosca* (*Volpone*) from ten o'clock until lunch-time, then a performance in the afternoon of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, playing Oberon—with *Hamlet* for the evening performance.

Mark Hambourg is coming down for the Whitsun week-end—giving a recital on the Sunday. An Air Force fellow who heard him the other day said, "He dive-bombed the keyboard, and secured several direct hits."

We had a lovely two weeks at the Old Theatre in Bristol. Do you know it? It is really enchanting—like Covent Garden Opera House on a very small scale. It's a pity that people don't know how to build a theatre these days. During a performance of *Hamlet* there, I had got to the line

And the devil hath power  
To assume a pleasing shape

when on walked the pregnant theatre cat, which gave me

one horrified look and then took a flying leap into one of the stage-boxes!

I hope you are well, dear James. Don't forget I shall be more than pleased to see you if you feel like a breath of Stratford air. I promise not to take you on the river.

Take care of yourself.

Blessings,  
Yours as ever,

JOHN B.

Part of a letter from George Richards :

This is the first night for some time we have not been bothered by the overhead Enemies of Sleep. On Sunday night amid all the usual lights, flares, and flashes there appeared for the first time in these skies what looked like a succession of deep-red, slowly ascending balls, beads, or bubbles not far above ground-level. Some describe the phenomenon as "flaming onions," but I am content with Banquo's

The earth hath bubbles, as the water has,  
And these are of them.

*May 23 Letter to George Lyttelton :  
Tuesday.*

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*

*May 28rd, 1944*

DEAR GEORGE LYTTELTON,

Hamlet or somebody tells us to find quarrel in a straw when honour's at the stake. A reporter's honour is his accuracy. On page 321 of *Ego* 2 under the date of January 21 Tuesday I say :

"At 9.25 came the statement: 'The King's life is moving peacefully towards its close.'"

On June 7 last you wrote me a letter rebuking me for this, saying that the wireless announcer must have said "to its close" and not "towards." In Noel Coward's film, *This Happy Breed*, which I saw to-night, a lower-middle-class family listens to the wireless on that January evening. You can distinctly hear Stuart Hibberd say, "The King's life is moving peacefully towards its close." The thing is obviously a record. Now what have you to say for yourself? Did you seriously think that on an occasion like this I, with that German thoroughness which has come to me through my

mother's upbringing at Heidelberg—did you think that I should not have taken it down *verbatim*?

This matter of accuracy has become very nearly No. 1 of my neuroses. The worst of it is that I find by bitter experience that I cannot trust anybody except myself. Here is an instance. The name of the housekeeper in *Rosmersholm* escaping me, I asked Leo Pavia, who said, "Mrs Helsing." I said, "Sure?" Leo said, "As sure as I am that Mr Dombey's name was Dombey." The proofs are corrected half a dozen times, and "Helsing" stands. Then comes the first of the bound copies, whereupon Leo says, "Oh, James, I forgot to tell you that 'Mrs Helsing' is wrong—the name is Helseth!" I have got to the stage when, if I want to allude to *Peer Gynt*, I have to look up the life of Ibsen to see if it was really he who wrote that play and not Strindberg! One of these days some cheap little reviewer is going to say that I have been careless with my proof-reading. When this happens I shall lay me doon and dee.

How are you?

Yours very sincerely,  
JAMES AGATE

*The Hon. George W. Lyttelton  
Eton College*

*May 24* Osbert Sitwell's new book, *Sing High! Sing Low!*, *Wednesday*. puts me in something of a difficulty. It gives me the feeling that I am reading above my class—living, so to speak, beyond my intellectual means. I slightly condense and cite :

The Common Man finds Woolworth's convenient, and therefore It Fulfils A Function, therefore the things it sells are not only useful, sometimes, and cheap, but a thousand times more beautiful than the antiquated products and goods of Egypt, Greece, Rome, Italy, and France in former times. For more than twenty years I have collected and made worlds, both old and new: some that existed, some that existed only as I saw them—and for me alone until I gave to my generation the key—and some that I created. Of the worlds existing in the past, I saw one in Cambodia, and handed it to you floating on the wings of kingfishers.

Will Osbert believe me when I say that I am one who finds Woolworth's convenient, and that I am more interested in that emporium than in anything brought me by kingfisher post?

O. S. writes exquisitely about Guatemala, a place I shall never visit, and wouldn't if I could. He writes adorably about the pictures of Salvator Rosa. Will he believe that I am far more interested in my early photographs of Jimmy Wilde ? He has essays on Marco Polo, to whom I am totally indifferent, Badminton, which I had thought of as a game for reducing weight but am now reminded is a country house, and a painter of the name of Pavel Tchelitchew, who, it appears, paints

huge, secund continents that turn to naked women, mountain ranges that are human, trees that have the limbs of men, masks of propheey, caught for a moment in the spherical and opalescent perfection of a soap-bubble, or the pathetic and artful foetus, immeasurably old for all its immaturity, and comprehending within itself the whole secret of animal birth and growth, as well as the magic of the choirs of angels.

Yes, I confess I am out of my depth here, while admiring the translucence of the waters by which I am laved.

*May 25* That National Savings poet who jabbered recently *Thursday*, about "the *grandeur* of Cumberland dells" would doubtless have enjoyed himself at to-night's grandiloquent version of *A Night in Venice*. Strauss's opera is essentially a little thing. But this country has very little taste for the small. It adores massed bands, and thinks two orchestras better than one but not so good as three, while its notion of a really slap-up string quartet is that it should take place in the Stadium at Wembley with a microphone attached to each desk and an amplifier at the top of each goal-post. In my view an opérette is something to be enjoyed after a dinner at which the women have been pretty and the men not fools. Possibly you arrive after the first act, and possibly you forget to come back for the last. But that was never the way of the English, who hate to take their pleasures light-heartedly. It was all very well for Mr Wemmick to have his "Halloa ! Here's a church ! Let's go in !" because getting married, and to a Skiffins, is no great shakes. But the modern Englishman is not born who will exclaim, "Hello ! Here's a theatre ! Let's drop in !" Still less must you expect him to say, "Oh, hell ! I've had enough of this. Let's drop out." Decency and his economic sense alike forbid.

Strauss's orchestration? Pooh! The chap was a foreigner! And what can foreigners be expected to know about orchestration? Wherefore we have poor old Johann Strauss, who, being an Austrian, could hardly tell a harp from a trombone, brought by one Erich Korngold up to British standard. (Constant Lambert told me at lunch to-day that in the lighter school the three great masters of orchestration, upon whom no finger should ever be laid, are Delibes, Offenbach, and Johann Strauss. And I said, "Yes, but have they the lush, treacly, palais-de-danse Orientalism dear to the British heart?") Now, having assembled an orchestra bursting with harps and trombones, obviously Korngold wasn't going to use it all up on a single opérette. Wherefore interpolation was piled on interpolation—the *Thousand and One Nights* Waltz, the *Acceleration* Waltz, the *Artists' Life* Waltz, the *Bei Uns z'Haus* Waltz, the Pizzicato Polka, and so forth. Then why not a ballet? By all means. The difference between grand opera and opérette is the difference between grand nonsense and little nonsense, with ballet common to both. Few operatic composers have been able to resist these gyratory orgies in improbable settings and times—Egyptian deserts, Swiss plateaux, the Elysian Fields, the night before the massacre of St Bartholomew, and half an hour after stout Vasco da Gama has stood far from silent on that peak in Africa.

My favourite description of the balletic phenomenon occurs in Halévy's *Madame et Monsieur Cardinal*:

Les demoiselles du corps de ballet dansaient, autour de Marguerite, la valse de la kermesse; et les dames des chœurs, alignées contre les décors, les bras ballants, avec un air d'ennui et de résignation, chantaiient :

Que la valse nous entraîne!  
Faisons retentir la plaine  
Du bruit de nos chansons!  
Valsons!  
Je respire à peine!  
Ah! quel plaisir! etc., etc.

Who does not know those wilting dressmakers' assistants listlessly pirouetting under the eyes of asthmatics dejectedly demanding transport on the wings of song? "Que la valse nous entraîne!" Indeed yes, since the only alternative is the dusting of the Opera House chairs. I didn't much like the men to-night. Dennis Noble bawled the roof off, the Duke

was too confidential, and Jerry Verno couldn't have been funny with that material if he had been six times George Graves. The principal female singer was a Miss Daria Bayan, a coloratura soprano, and much better than most of the Techniecoloratura sopranos I hear on the screen. But the best thing in the show was the ballet. For though ballet-dancers may fall flat, there is this to be said for them—that they can never sing sharp.

*May 26* Had been asleep a couple of hours or so last night *Friday*. when I was aroused by an urgent knocking at my flat-door. It was the caretaker and her husband to say that their son Peter, in hospital at Colindale, had had a sudden collapse and could I get them a car ? I bethought me of a place which has a night service, and in less than ten minutes the car arrived. It was then getting on for five. The driver made the journey in a little over a quarter of an hour, and they got to the hospital ten minutes before the boy died. I was very fond of Peter, who retained his cheerfulness although knowing that he had both diabetes and consumption. I never saw him when he was not jolly, like a young Mark Tapley. He looked about fifteen, but was actually twenty-three. He died on his birthday.

*May 27* This afternoon I went to see a revival of *Le Roi s'amuse*, with the result that for the time being I just cannot be fair to any British film. The makers of this famous picture will doubtless plead that it is a burlesque ; if so, I shall maintain that a burlesque may be the highest form of truth. The king of some ridiculous country in the Balkans who visits Paris and at the Opéra refrains from applauding for fear of waking the President ; the glittering actress who takes on a new lover with less excitement than she pulls on a pair of old stockings ; the Deputy who uses his wife's infidelity as a stepping-stone to Cabinet rank—all these people are entirely true to life and drawn without the slightest exaggeration. Consider the end ! The king comes to spend the night at the house of one Bourdier, a deputy of left-wing persuasion but enormously wealthy. After the festivities His Majesty retires to rest and incidentally takes Bourdier's wife with him. Next morning Bourdier threatens a scandal, but is pacified by being

given the post of Minister of Commerce, and in gratitude the king signs the trade treaty, which he had not intended to do. I am still laughing at Bourdier's remark on receiving his portfolio : " Tell Madame that all is forgiven, but that I still take a poor view of her having chosen the day of my election to Cabinet rank to commit *cette inconséquence*." Lovely performances by Raimu, Victor Francen, Gaby Morlay, and Elvire Popescu.

**May 28** A week or so ago I again met in the Café Royal the *Sunday*. young man with whom I had the extraordinary conversation reported in my entry for March 14. I said, " All joking apart, how intellectual are you ? " He said, " Try me ! " Whereupon I trotted out the old teaser about the three schoolboys with the three red and two white tabs. He said, " I'll send you the answer to-morrow." Two days later I got a note written in a really dreadful fist. I replied to this, saying, " Not only have you taken the problem down wrong, but you have the worst handwriting I have ever seen." When I got in to-night I found shoved under my door a letter written in unimaginably lovely copperplate, in which, incidentally, the young man admits that he cannot spell. Which is fortunate. " Perumbulating " is a beauty. It looks as though John Shreeve Barrington and I are going to be friends.

**May 29** A letter from Jock !!  
*Monday.*

(*Still at Haslar*)  
25th May, 1944

DEAR JAMIE,

*Non ragionam di lor'*, said Dante, meaning " Let's not go into all that now ! " But you *should* of course have written to me when I first got caught in this War Trap. I sent you a whimpering letter-card in my first week (you admit receiving it), and you *should* have answered it—and at least have *asked* if there was anything I needed or couldn't obtain. The *Sunday Times*, for example ! Dear old Hadley now regularly sends it to me every Monday morning, just as Ivor regularly sends me the *Observer*. *All* my other friends wrote at once, and continue to write often. And you break your six months' silence with this long, studied letter, reeking of

the midnight *Ego*-facient oil, and full of cautious sentences about counts, and indictments, and challenges. You ignored even my birthday in January—though I asked you for once in a way not to ignore it. Don't you ever remember anybody's birthday excepting your own? You don't even show any sincere concern about my health though I've been in bed for five weeks with a cracked skull. (Did I one evening hear you broadcasting about DREYFUS? Or was that just the state I was in then?) However, I think I'll forgive you because you were splendidly like your Old Self on the passing of Martin-Harvey in last Sunday's paper. And I'll forgive you wholly if you send me another and a better letter in your own handwriting. Don't *type* back that you're too busy. D'ye recollect the well-bred lady at Barnet who made four unavailing calls at Livingstone Cottage on behalf of some local charity, and on the fifth occasion pushed our Abigail on one side, stepped into the drawing-room, surveyed the over-busy scene —You, Me, and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*—and simply said, “Most impressive—*good morning!*” before sweeping out and making us both feel peculiarly small. That incident always comes into my mind when I feel like telling any friend I'm too busy to write to him or her. And so, still more so, should it come into yours.

Ever,  
Jock

P.S. I am at home on sick leave and return at the weekend. When is the next *Ego* coming out?

I have replied :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*  
*May 29th, 1944*

DEAR JOCK,

*No diga tonterías!* as the Grand Inquisitor said, meaning, unless my greengrocer's boy lies, “Don't talk nonsense!” But of course my letter was a studied composition; it was designed to prove to posterity that Mr Micawber had not deserted Mrs Micawber.

I dissent from the view that the stayers-behind should break the ice. Can you really imagine a fond spouse writing, “Dear Mungo, everything in the Park is very forward. I suppose the shrubs are all out in Pongo Pongo”? Or Mrs Stanley—if there was a Mrs—writing, “I hope, Henry Morton, you've prepared a nice speech for that dear Dr Livingstone.” Or even some Spanish Momma sending an admonitory, “Dear Cortez, don't get too stout!” Fish, my

dear Jock, and likewise Zut ! You are on much safer ground when you say I forgot your birthday. I did indeed, and No, I never remember anybody's except my own. I am afraid there is a wee spot of too much Ego in my Cosmos, as Hans Breitmann said to the orang-outang. But enough of these pribbles and prabbles. I don't care what the grievance was so long as I am assured there was a grievance ! What I did not want to feel was that you had found and embraced a Navy-sent opportunity to shake this Old Man of the Sea off your back for good and all. My letter, therefore, had two objects—to clear this up and put posterity right. Don't laugh. Posterity is going to take a lot of interest in you and me—particularly me !

Now how shall I entertain you ? You have probably heard that Mr G. has decided to produce that startling novelty, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. That the Old Vic re-opens at the New Theatre with *Peer Gynt*—gosh, shan't I be bored ! No, I don't think you look to me for theatrical gossip. There isn't much news except that a friend of mine in North London, who lives opposite the local brothel, looked out of his window the other morning and saw a police van, followed by an ambulance, draw up and take away a mother and her new-born babe. Shade of *La Maison Tellier* ! That the Hallé Orchestra has females among the brass, including a very good tympanist. That Barbirolli got rapped over the knuckles by the *Times* critic for having sacrificed melodic line to colour effect in Tschaikowsky's No. 6—can't you see that tympanist tearing third-movement holes in her blouse ? That I gently rebuked Osbert Sitwell for giving an unnecessary *Umlaut* to Murger : "Whoever else may be dotty, it is not the author of *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème*." That O. S. riposted magnanimously in a letter saying, "I think *Responsibility* very fine—and when I say very fine, I mean *very fine*." He faults the book principally through its failure to convey time : "The later chapters fall on one with no weight of time ; flat ; there is no time to be felt *between* them." I know. I was conscious of this as I sat at my desk in that orderly-room long ago at Lus la Croix Haute partly finishing the book, and partly watching Indians pile up seven thousand tons of dates.

I don't suppose you hear much of the present war : people in the Army and, I suppose, Navy seldom do. Here, of course, we wait for our invasion flood to rise more impatiently than Noah waited for that other to subside. Bertie van Thal—who is now a considerable noise at the Ministry of Food with the important job of providing senior officers with asparagus—Bertie was quite certain that IT was going to

happen on Saturday last. Taking up the telephone that morning, I found myself listening to a private conversation in which one speaker said to the other, "Keep this under your hat, old man. I understand there's something *dans le vent* for this week-end." American majors tell me we shall go through the Atlantic Wall like butter. Canadian colonels say we shall turn it. And Goebbels, after explaining that it is made of solid concrete ten feet high, and fifteen feet thick, goes on to add, "Germans, however, must believe that the Atlantic Wall, like the rest of the German defences, is essentially mobile." In fact, the whole thing has got so much on my nerves that, meeting the First Lord at lunch yesterday, I said irritably, "If you knew as much about what is going on as I do, you'd be back at your desk *pronto*!"

But I'm sure the war isn't what you want your James to discourse on. Shall I tell you that the B.B.C. has promoted me to be film critic for the next three film talks? And here is a lovely bit of our old friend James Bridie, proving once more how the amateurs can always beat the professionals on their own, the professionals', wicket. He is talking about Claude Houghton, who, you know, has always been one of my blind spots: "It is his foible to keep his humour out of sight—an almost unique method in the whole history of writing." Have had a bit of a row with Beverley Baxter, who splashes about the *Evening Standard* every Saturday like a porpoise. Here is a piece of him on *The Student Prince*: "Mr Bruce Trent used to play the bass fiddle in Mr Hylton's band, which probably accounts for his broad shoulders and slim figure." (Italics mine.) As far as my own work is concerned I'm doing all right, I think.

*Re* domestic matters. Freddie Gibson has left, having taken a room at Swiss Cottage in a house studded with sculptors and plastered with painters. He is replaced by Jackie Naughton, Charlie Rogers's buddy, slightly wounded after four years in Africa. A very nice fellow with, thank Heaven, a sense of humour. Taking him to a trade-show of a picture about Baghdad—all Dorothy Lamour and Technicolor—I was rewarded by hearing him say, "I've just come back from the \_\_\_\_ place. And this \_\_\_\_ picture isn't like one \_\_\_\_ corner of it!"

And that's all for the moment. Have got a very full week ahead, and have given up going to Lord's—England versus Australia—in order to write this. A little, too, perhaps, because I don't see myself fighting for a bus with 30,000 other people. *Re* your accident. But why not tell me more about it? Or can't you? I suspect it happened during a search

à la Bardell for that repose and peace which a training-ship can never afford. In any case I am sympathetic. But it's very difficult to be sympathetic *in vacuo*.

*Ego* 6? But you ought to know that I never publish an *Ego* unless there's a Death, an Abdication, a Coronation, or a General Strike! Something to keep the people out of the bookshops. The day the book appears you will know that IT has started. . . . In the meantime, if there is anything you want, say so, and you shall have it. With which truly magnificent gesture I subscribe myself,

As ever,  
JAMIE

May 31      Letter from George Lyttelton :  
*Wednesday.*

Warre House  
Eton College  
May 29, 1944

DEAR JAMES AGATE,

It was very pleasant to hear from you again, even in anger. For the moment my head, though undoubtedly bloody, is unbowed—so stubborn is human nature when its vanity is aroused! For I still could swear, and so would my son, that Stuart Hibberd said “to.” Do you think, perhaps, there may have been a *varia lectis*? He had to say the sentence about a dozen times as far as I remember. Anyhow, we shall soon know, as I have written to him, and if he is as kindly as his voice he will answer. If he doesn't I shall write to Gerald Kelly (whom I expect you know), who is at Windsor Castle, and get him to tackle Queen Mary herself—a bold task, but he is a bold man. I am sure you agree that “to” is much the better version—and not only to the ear? Meanwhile, though not yet grovelling, I am prepared to grovel, and will do so duly when proved wrong.

Apropos of grovel, *Ego* 2, p. 190, in relishing “No money, no grovel,” you are giving a bouquet to Rutland Barrington, or possibly Fred Billington, and not Gilbert, for it is a gag. What would the old fury have said if he had heard it?

I find in the well-beloved Cardus's *Good Days* C. L. Townsend recalled as a left-hand bowler, and Bonnor given a black beard.

I hope you are flourishing. *Brief Chronicles* has been a great delight. How on earth you can write seven notices of

*Macbeth* with unsailing freshness passes my comprehension.  
Does your brain *never* fail to generate ideas?

I will not shirk my apology, when I have no longer any loophole. Will let you know what S. H. says.

Yours very sincerely,  
GEORGE LYTTELTON

To which I have replied :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*  
*May 31st, 1944*

DEAR GEORGE LYTTELTON,

Thanks a million, as they say.

Re misprints. I have decided to take a tip from a smart shop I saw in the Knightsbridge district years ago. It had three windows, over which was printed : left, "Estéve"; centre, "Estève"; right, "Estèv."

That's all for now.

Ever,  
JAMES AGATE

*June 1*      Jock called last night round about twelve and *Thursday*. stayed till four, to the enhancement of my spirits and depletion of my whiskey. It seems he hates the Navy. Bored to the verge of insanity, his only refuge has been to make a complete index to Boswell's *Johnson*, the only time this has ever been attempted. Is totally indifferent to the war, and when I ask whether he does not find bandaging sailors and nursing them generally a form of defeating Hitlerism, he replies, "My dear Jamie, I am the most unpolitical person in the world. I know nothing about Hitlerism. I regard the continent of Europe as a place to go walking in."

*June 2*      Wrote again to George Lyttelton :  
*Friday*.

DEAR GEORGE LYTTELTON,

Please regard this as a postscript to my last letter. Or even as a separate letter.

What is this demon of inaccuracy that pursues me? Yesterday I attended Martin-Harvey's memorial service at St Paul's Church, Covent Garden. A large crowd with many

ghosts. I sat immediately beneath the memorial to Dr Arne, and for a little meditated on those two narrow lines :

BAPTIZED IN THIS CHURCH  
BURIED IN THIS CHURCHYARD

Then brought up sharp by the discovery that in "Let us now praise famous men" the "now" had been omitted! Returning home, I was not surprised to find Leo Pavia making me say that in the reign of Charles II the street-lamps were lit only on moonlight nights. It should have been "moonless," of course. But the old dear means well, and his slips are generally attributable to a kind of *Spoonerismus* which is also sometimes behaviouristic, if that's the right word. For example, if I ask for the fifth book on the third shelf he will *always* bring me the third book on the fifth shelf! The people who really annoy me are the ignorant and wilfully careless bastards, drat 'em! Yes, you are right. It doesn't look as if Jack's memorial service had done me much good, does it?

Yours ever,  
JAMES AGATE

P.S. A messenger has just arrived with a parcel. It contains a novel, a friend's novel. The first page is virgin but for a quotation :

The cat will mew, and the dog will have his day.  
As Hamlet did not remark.

*June 3*      My unknown friends again :  
*Saturday.*

THE GERMAN-EUROPEAN KULTURVEREIN

*Immanuel Kant House  
Hegel Road  
Bromdesbury*

*2 June, 1944*

DEAR MR AGATE,

To consecrate the kolossal Viktories of our freinds and Alleis the Russians we have the Intention to hold a Festival-Zelevation at our intimat Theatre as from Beginn of August. It has succeeded to us to persuade our dear Kollege, the Europa-famous Romanzwriter Ewald Hustenthal, who is fortunately now in London, to write for us in German a Novelle

about a Russian Heroine of which the Inzidents arc grounded on Fakt.

This is the Novelle *Alexandra Ivorovna Nikitichibutikin*. This so brave girl is already soldier only sixteen, she is called " Alex " by all her Kameraden, she is zclebrate as great Battler. At Kornoff shc alone kills twenty-five Nazis with stones. At Petropolovsk she seises a Maschine-gun, and with it kills two hundred and five Nazis in two minutes and two sekonds. She takes off the Uniformen of the Nazis and gives them to the poor and starving children who embrace her. At Minsk she is kissed by Voroshiloff, and made Kaptaian. At once she takes in each hand a Revolver and kills, with one Hand fifteen Nazis, with the other twenty-five Nazis, which include two Majorcen and a Military Doktor. At Pinsk she is kissed by Montowski and is made Major. After which she at once shoots eight hundred Nazis from the top of a tree. In Binsk she by Mistake shoots her own Familie, but revenges herself when she shoots the Kommandant of the S.S., the Kommandant of the T.T., and the Oberkommandant of the X.X. At last she is dekorated with the Cross of the Seven Cities and in the arms of Stalin dies, still shooting in all Direktions, singing Nazionalsongs and Dancing the Petruschka. Is this not fine and dramatisch ? Meister Hustenthal has promised to read it to our Russian Guests himself. Enough for now, good Mr Agate. I sign myself your faithful Admirer,

*Phil. Stud.* HEINZ BUTTERBROD

*June 4* Why is *The Winter's Tale* unpopular ? Some people *Sunday*, have alleged the gap between the third and fourth acts to be the reason for their aversion. On the theory, perhaps, that devouring Time blunts more things than lions' paws—to wit, theatrical interest. Have given to-day's *S.T.* readers a slice of Quiller-Couch, to whom for many years I meant to write but never did. I should like him to have known that of all the critics of Shakespeare he has pleased me most. About this play " Q " wrote :

Shakespeare, master of resources though he was, could hit on no device to avoid having to present, in an action of some three hours, the children Marina and Perdita first as babes exposed, helpless as innocent, to the surge of the sea and the beasts of the forest, anon as maidens grown up to reunite parental hearts long astray, redeem inveterate wrongs, cancel old woes, heal the past with holy hope.

But "Q" possessed in addition to his sympathy great store of sanity and shrewdness, and could on occasion get down to the gist of the matter as forthrightly as Hazlitt or as bluntly as Johnson. By the way, if I were asked for my favourite stroke of Shakespearean criticism it would be one of Samuel's notes to *The Merchant of Venice*. Lorenzo asks who comes with Portia, and Stephano replies, "None but the holy hermit and her maid." Whereupon Johnson growls, "I do not perceive the use of this hermit, of whom nothing is seen or heard afterwards." "Q" dismissed the bear—I mean the one in *The Winter's Tale*—with the remark: "The bear is a naughty superfluity." Reverting to why people dislike this play, I don't think it necessary to look for reasons. I don't believe an audience is worried by unexpected Third Murderers, hermits of whom no more is heard, frisking Time, improbable bears, and sea-coasts as far removed from their proper place as a modern beauty's eyebrows. But if I had to find a reason I should say it is because Hermione talks too much, and in an idiom that is too difficult. One of the reasons *Hamlet* is a popular play is because it is comparatively easy to take in. In the version normally performed I can think of only one passage which gives the average playgoer any trouble. This is Gertrude's

This is the very coinage of your brain :  
This bodiless creation ecstasy  
Is very cunning in.

I doubt whether the average person realises that what the Queen is saying in the last two lines is no more than: "People who are mad are very good at imagining things, and believing them to be real." But Hermione's talk is nothing but the most difficult jargon. For example:

Cram's with praise, and make's  
As fat as tame things : one good deed dying tongueless  
Slaughters a thousand waiting upon that.  
Our praises are our wages : you may ride's  
With one soft kiss a thousand furlongs ere  
With spur we heat an acre.

Yes, I know all about "When daffodils begin to peer." Which does not prevent Autolycus from being a sad dog who tires me in very much less than a mile-a.

June 5 Part of a letter from Ralph Baker, the "B" of Monday. *Ego 3*, now a captain in the R.A.M.C. in Persia :

I abominate this cauldron of nothingness. When one is not drowned in a pool of perspiration, one is singed by the hellish hot breeze. I am going slowly mad. Quietly, without any fuss, and rather acquiescing. The heat destroys everything—the stitching in your boots, the cream in your shaving-tube. The whole arca has the atmosphere of a crematorium. At night, we call it the graveyard with lights. In the nearly always prevailing sandstorm, the ghosts and ghouls creep out of their graves, take one dim and bleary look at what the graveyard has to offer—and go back. I trudge limply from dreary officers' mess to drearier officers' mess. I'm gay until it kills me. *Please, PLEASE*, send me a long list of all the improper stories you know—it's the only currency here. I offer them wit, charm, philosophy, Nietzsche, Engels, Schopenhauer, Lenin, even Agate, but they shake their heads sadly. I drink here, I drink there. I go occasionally to the cinema, and see films that I have already seen. No, not in Egypt, in London! I eat mostly bully and an unrecognisable dehydrated potato. So life, as you see, is one mad round of pleasure. But do I care? Not much. Actually I'm not as depressed as I ought to be. What the hell!

June 6 At last! I wonder whether Churchill, when he said, Tuesday. "We shall fight on the beaches," had any idea that the beaches would be the enemy's? Invasion Day has been cold, cheerless, and forbidding, with a heavily charged, overcast sky that would not descend to rain. Very few people in the streets, and no excitement. I suggested writing a little piece for the *Express* to-morrow, but was told that everything was being sacrificed to news, that they were even taking all advertisements out of the paper, and that in the circumstances I must realise there was no room for prose!

June 7 Took the chair for Robert Sherwood debating Wednesday. about the theatre at the Churchill Club, in *Indigo Jones*'s exquisite Ashburnham House in Little Dean's Yard, Westminster. John Mason Brown, dramatic critic and gallant naval officer, was to have been the other speaker, but could not come. Raymond Mortimer deputised,

and in place of the fat, elderly, pompous highbrow I had expected he turned out to be thin, youngish, amusing, modest, and in every way charming. The room was crowded, the audience consisting largely of Americans, from officers of high rank to privates, overflowing into the next room and half-way down the stairs. I began by saying some nice things about Sherwood, after which, in order to get the show going, I accused Mortimer of being a highbrow and of believing (1) that if the lower classes had bathrooms they would use them ; (2) that the uglier music sounds the more beautiful it is ; (3) that the dustman would be a more efficient dustman if he could be persuaded to read Proust ; and (4) that if German youth could be taught to recite "Mary had a little lamb" it would drop the *Herrenvolk* nonsense for ever. Having got the audience into a highly receptive mood, I sat down, lit a cigar, and prepared to listen and enjoy myself. But it was not to be. After six minutes Sherwood said he had no more to say about the theatre, and Mortimer said that as he seldom or never went to the play he had no views on the subject. Obviously I couldn't allow any meeting of which I am chairman to flop in this disgraceful fashion, so I set to work, let off a lot of impromptu fireworks, and finally got them both talking again.

And what nonsense did they talk ! Mortimer said that the only nineteenth-century playwrights who remained alive were Ibsen, Strindberg, and Tchekov. Sherwood said that in his opinion all art ought to be didactic and propagandist, and that the only hope for the theatre was that the new generation would bring a new mind to it. Whereupon I set about both and told them to put their thinking in order. I told them that they were confusing the art of drama with the business of entertainment. I told Mortimer that on the first of these two planes he was right about Ibsen, Strindberg, and Tchekov, but that all three were as dead as mutton on the plane of playhouse draws unless there was some other bait such as the presence of a Mr G. or a Vivien Leigh. Then I told Sherwood that he was right about the new mind provided that he too was talking in terms of abstract drama, but that as far as filling the theatres was concerned the British public wouldn't stand for new minds. That it would with difficulty accept new material, and then

only on condition that the new playwright wove the old sentimental twaddle around it. In the end the evening turned into a raging success.

Supper afterwards with Stanley and Vera Rubinstein, where I met the Moiseiwitsches and Basil Cameron. Home at one o'clock, fell asleep in the armchair, and woke about three to find the wireless reproducing the leading article from to-day's *Manchester Guardian*, showing a nobility of conception and splendour of writing about which the London Press knows nothing :

Four years ago a small British force took ship from the Dunkirk beaches, leaving behind it nothing but a memory like the ghost-like memory that haunts Corunna, but taking with it, like Sir John Moore's army, the spirit that was to sustain the courage of Europe. Hitler seemed to have Europe at his mercy, and his mercy was that of the ancestors of the Nazis described by Bridges in his *Testament of Beauty* :

Ruthless invaders, live firebrands, that spread  
The blast of their contagion to Allemand and Frank,  
Burgundian, Vandal, and Lombard, from Angles and Dane  
To furthest Kelt.

These firebrands were lighting up red skies in one country after another, like a lamplighter touching into flame a row of gas-jets in a street. . . .

*June 8* Bertie van Thal telephones to say that he hears *Thursday*. on all sides that last night's talk was the best that had ever taken place at the Churchill Club.

A letter from George Lyttelton, who, it seems, was tied by the leg on the Fourth of June. He tells me that he is retiring from schoolmastering in July, and intends to spend the rest of his days near Woodbridge, where he hopes to get some descendant of Fitzgerald's Posh to read aloud to him of an evening. The letter goes on :

You must be like an old colleague of mine who was always driven into a frenzy when boys dropped books, pens, etc., and was so terrifying to them that when he spoke to them they were apt to drop all they had in their hands because they were frightened of doing so. Housman had the same horror of misprints ; all his friends knew it, and took all possible precautions—and there was a misprint in the hymn

sung at his funeral, which he himself had composed. But to alleviate a small part of your anxiety, I must tell you that you were perfectly right about "towards its close," and I was perfectly wrong. Stuart Hibberd looked up his diary. I feel almost inclined to say what that ass (wasn't he?) Clement Shorter said in some Brontë controversy: "What is astonishing in all this is that I should have been wrong," so certain was I that I heard "to." However, I score in the end; for if I had not made the slip I should not have had four letters from you!

Those misprints must sting you like wasps! Not so much, however, as Edmund Gosse when he was printed as "Edmund Goose," or Bottomley when he was given the Christian name Hotairio!

I hope you will be on the Brains Trust again soon. You are the only one who treats the questions as they should be treated: *i.e.*, half derisively and half provocatively. But I expect you have blotted your copy-book. The B.B.C. likes its men tame.

*June 9*      Dined last night with Lady Cunard at the Dorchester—  
*Friday*.      one of those ultra-smart parties where somebody says, "You know Booboo and Snooky, of course." and you spend the evening wondering who these fellow-guests are. I recognised Kenneth Clark, but have no idea of the identity of the colonel who was also a connoisseur of pictures, the lady who had been a Russian princess, and the striking beauty from the Chilean Embassy. It was both instructive and amusing to hear from the horse's mouth, as it were, what the upper classes talk about when they think they are among themselves. I minded my *p*'s all right, but dropped a few *q*'s. One was when X's name cropped up, and I said he was a snob and an ass who had made a mess of every ministerial post he had occupied and was loathed by the people he hadn't met even more than by the people he had. Whereupon it turned out that the politician in question was the friend of every bosom round the table! Good food, two bottles of native wine contributed by the Chilean lady, some excellent brandy, and a vile cigar. I had a frantic desire to descend into the restaurant and buy one, but decided that this might be thought odd in Mayfair. Left early, and got to the Café Royal in time for the whisky-and-soda and smoke I was dying for.

June 10      Letter from Brother Mycroft :  
 Saturday.

14 John Dalton Street  
 Manchester 2

June 8, 1944

DEAR JIMMIE,

Many thanks for sending me *Ego* 6.

I can understand your being excited, though I hear that British phlegm is asserting itself as usual, even in London. Here there is no excitement except, I believe, yesterday, when a runaway horse was stopped in Market Street.

I have just heard the midnight news, containing a cold-blooded, in fact rather triumphant announcement that the centre of my beloved Caen has "disappeared." You may or may not know Caen, but it is, or I fear was, packed with historic and architectural treasures. It contained the two most famous Romanesque abbeys in the world, in perfect preservation—the Abbaye aux Hommes and the Abbaye aux Dames, built respectively by William the Conqueror and Matilda his wife. They were first cousins, and each built an abbey to appease the Pope, who objected to their marriage. Caen has also a cathedral, a Norman castle, and a score of historic churches. I don't know any other town in France so rich in treasures. The damage was done by naval gunfire, I believe. It is not a big town, and "the centre" probably includes everything of note.

I enclose a cutting giving the national prayer which is recommended to the churches. Did you ever see anything like it? It isn't English. Close analysis is required to find out what it means, and as a prayer for the common people it is just about as unsuitable as it could be. It is worse than extempore prayers, so dear to the hearts of Nonconformist parsons, which give the Almighty quite a lot of detailed information on topical subjects.

Do you know the epic one in this respect which the late Theo. Halliday used to tell with much relish, Wesleyan though he was? It was in a well-known Wesleyan church in Halifax that the parson prayed thus: "Oh Lord, Thou knowest that we are gathered together for worship in an edifice known for its architectural qualities throughout the whole of the North of England!"

I should be glad if you would return the cutting with your paraphrase of its meaning and see if it agrees with mine. Bet you a bob it doesn't.

Here is the prayer :

" Almighty Father, of whom the whole family in Heaven and on earth is named, we pray Thee to guide the nations of the world to live as members of one family, inspire the peoples who have found in conflict the strength which comes from unity to preserve that unity in peace, and so to order the world in righteousness that all mankind may know the joy of fellowship in service of the kingdom."

I wonder what the authors of the Revised Version or even the Most High Prince James would have thought of English less good than Mrs Beeton's, who, when she tells you to take a dozen eggs, means a dozen eggs. It is impossible to tell from this prayer which peoples the Archbishop and the two Moderators are instructing the Almighty to inspire. Is it only those who, by keeping their unity intact, are going to win ? If so, it follows that the nations which have lost through their failure to preserve unity must be excluded from God's blessing. Since I cannot believe that the Archbishop and the Moderators would presume to instruct God, I can only conclude that they haven't the vaguest idea what they are praying for.

Ever,  
GUSTAVE

*June 11* I was telling somebody at the Club to-day Esmé Sunday. · Percy's story of how Sarah Bernhardt played Lady Macbeth dressed entirely in leopard-skins. Howard Young looked up from his paper and said, " Tell us, James. How did she deal with the line ' Out, damned spot ' ? "

*June 12* " What ! No blazing star appear ? No monsters born ? No whale thrown up ? " Not being Swift, I shall merely announce the publication this morning of *Ego* 6.

*June 13* Somebody has sent me Walkley's *Playhouse Impressions*. I open at random and read :

It is time we heard the last of this stale complaint against people for talking about themselves. After all, there is no subject they can treat better, for there is none which interests them so much. The worthy souls who were so angry with George Eliot for declaring that her favourite book was Rousseau's *Confessions* must have been egregious dullards.

Let them ponder over the popularity of the Diary of Marie Bashkirtseff. I can fancy some one objecting that the value of autobiography depends on the autobiographer. Egoistic literature, by all means, provided that the egoist is a genius like Rousseau or an orchidaceous personality like Marie Bashkirtseff. But you must be something out of the common before you have this right to talk about what you are. The egoism that is not wanted is the egoism of mediocrity, the egoism, say, of a mere theatrical critic.

And, of course, A. B. W. at once proceeds to demolish this and prove to his satisfaction and mine that egoism in criticism is "the great critic's crowning glory and the poor criticaster's saving grace."

My obsession continues. Meaning that on page 58 of this book "Des Esseintes" appears as "Dcs Essarts."

*June 14* Letter from an unknown friend who is by way of *Wednesday*. being a wit:

Recognising your dislike of being asked on first nights "what you think of it," I hope you will not mind if, the next time I see you at Lord's, I introduce myself and ask your views on the play.

*June 15* I went this afternoon to the new film, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, at the London Pavilion, without having read Thornton Wilder's book, hailed as a masterpiece when it came out. Looking to my old friend Synopsis, I learned that this is the story of a priest, one Brother Juniper, who was concerned to discover why, when some time in 1714 the finest bridge in Peru broke, five travellers should have been chosen for destruction out of the hundreds of persons who passed over the bridge every day. That the priest saw the accident at a time when he "happened to be in Peru converting the Indians." But surely if Brother Juniper had known his Bible better he would have bethought him of Ecclesiastes' "Time and chance happeneth to them all," chucked his inquest, and devoted whatever energy he had left after converting the Indians to forming a society for better and stronger bridges. *But would this have provided Wilder with a theme for a novel?* No.

"Can we not all remember with a shiver," asked Walkley,

"certain stage versions of Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray?" And I bethink me of the courier in *Esmond* galloping "to inform him, who was Earl of Arran yesterday, that he was Duke of Hamilton to-day, and of a thousand great schemes, hopes, ambitions, that were alive in the gallant heart, beating a few hours since, and now in a little dust quiescent." Not Orson Welles himself could do anything with that "little dust quiescent." All he or any film director could give us would be a diminishing view of the courier with a galloping horse kicking up a lot of dust turbulent! Recognising this, I was prepared not to look in the picture for a reproduction of whatever it was that Wilder had done in his novel. But I was equally unprepared for the mushy, back-stage story. What if the events happened in Peru two hundred and thirty years ago? Peru is entitled to its mush, and a story does not cease to be American back-stage merely because the stage is South America in 1714. In fact, I found when I came out of the cinema that I just couldn't believe that the film was even a reasonable transcription of the novel, provided the novel was all that some quite good critics have claimed for it. Wherefore I hied me to Hatchard's, and bought a copy of the book, and perused it. I found, as I had all along suspected, that the metaphysico-theological framework was all my eye and Brother Juniper, and that Wilder could have reached the same conclusion if his novel had been about five people scalded to death in a Turkish bath, or five travellers in an express train who, sticking their heads out of five windows, find themselves decapitated. "There is a land of the living and a land of the dead, and the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning," is sentimental twaddle. It may, of course, be merely Brother Juniper's and not Wilder's twaddle, but I feel that Willie Maugham would have dropped a hint to that effect. It was, of course, the twaddle in this book and not the pastiche of eighteenth-century letter-writing which sold it. The great public hates pastiche and adores twaddle.

I was a little worried in the matter of arithmetic. In the book the five victims are the Marquesa de Montemayor, the little maid Pepita, the less likeable of the two Peruvian Brothers, the theatrical manager and pander, Uncle Pio, and Don Jaime, the seven-year-old son of Camila Perecholo, actress and mistress of the Viceroy. In the book Camila has a remarkable career.

She deceives the Viceroy with a toreador, has a son by the Viceroy, gets smallpox, retires from the stage, and is left at the end with her head on the knees of an abbess. In the film there is no toreador, neither is Camila the Viceroy's mistress. Hollywood has told us that the Dubarry was a lady, and Camila is a lady in the sense that she grabs whatever she can get out of the Viceroy and gives nothing in return. Needless to say she has no child and, unless my eyes deceived me, she is left at the end in the arms of the more likeable of the Peruvian Brothers, who has become a prosperous sea-captain, whereas in the book he dies of blood-poisoning. The immediate point is this: In the film Camila has no child, and consequently there is no child to be killed. Who, then, takes Don Jaime's place in the accident? Is it the Indian who carries a sack of grain across the screen once and is not glimpsed again?

Here, then, is what I make of the business. *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* would have been a good novel if Wilder had been content to draw an objective picture of a muddle-headed priest of two hundred years ago. In so far as the author identifies himself with Brother Juniper, the book was sentimental slush. But Wilder was cleverer than that. He contrived to have a foot in each camp and to suggest in turns Anatole France and the Rev. Silas Hocking. And this, of course, was why *The Bridge* became a best-seller; the half that was Anatole hoodwinking Arnold Bennett and the half that was Silas roping in the rest.

*June 16*    Telegram from Jock yesterday:  
*Friday.*

Thank you for new *Ego* long and positively Brother Edwardian barrage of criticism in preparation.

This morning I receive sixteen closely written pages from which, omitting the diatribe about my finances, I cull:

An admirable frontispiece photograph [by Hans Man]—the Beethoven scowl is obviously meant to suggest that your inspiration can be disturbed by any telephone call from anybody—though to me it rather indicates a Sunday morning and some angry young actress ringing up to ask what you mean by your *S.T.* notice—say Perdita Milk or Imogen Water.

P. 25. Here I think the extremely complex and desperately unpaintable Leo suddenly comes to life *at last* (through the admirable sentence about his india-rubber face at the musical party). Cf. Quiller-Couch's remark in one of his lectures on Dorothy Wordsworth :

" Anybody who knows the art of fiction knows that a detailed inventory is the most primitive of all ways of conveying an impression concerning any person ; that the impression can be far more accurately and subtly produced by the record of a gesture or a tone in the conversation."

Leo seems to me to be *caught* here in this manner.

P. 82. Yes, Leo's very likeness is coming up at last, like a " slow " negative in the dark-room.

P. 86. " Dickens's Marchioness " is a glaringly wrong example of what you mean. The ghost of Dick Swiveller will probably call and knock you on the nose for the wrongness of it ! Re-read, or rather, read, *The Old Curiosity Shop*. The Marchioness is an exquisite creation (one of Dickens's surest, subtlest, and greatest) who is as remote from baggagedom as you are from Savonarola ! I've often thought that Barrie took quite a thing or two from D.'s M. and that the " wee giant " (as you so wittily call him) breathed not a word to a soul.

P. 182. Leo's very self.

Pp. 186-7. Rampant misogyny should be far wittier, lighter, more *espièglerish* than this to be excusable. And what chinks you leave for the feminists, the Rebecca Wests and Edith Shackletons ! It is disingenuous to dismiss feminine achievements in the novel with an inconspicuous word (what of Jane and the houris of Haworth, to mention no others ?) To ignore the big Emils of poetry. To pretend that women cannot play everything in music—excepting (a) Brahms and (b) the trombone and the drum—as well or even better (*e.g.*, Beethoven No. 4) than men. Incidentally I—*pace* Leo—would never have permitted you to talk of " the easier piano concertos of Mozart." You ought to know—and Leo does know—that each one of those nineteen or twenty works is of major difficulty in every sense that matters. They demand, they insist upon, they necessitate *style*—the rarest quality in any pianist, man or woman. I have heard many pianists tackle them. But I have only once heard one played with the necessary ravishment of style—a performance of the C minor Concerto by Fanny Davies not long before she died.

P. 185. If your edition of *Hamlet* has the reading : " Give

me *that* man That is not passion's slave," scrap it and buy another—now.

Then something about misprints, ending :

P. 282. *Et qui donc est ce M. de Rubembré ? ?*

The manifesto ends with this little letter :

DEAR JAMIE,

The book was wholly read, and these notes were scribbled, (a) in my hammock in daylight and (b) in a casualty clearing station at night. The odour of roses, pinks, and stocks through the window by day—the ditto of blood, Dettol, and gas-gangrene at night, all around me.

Your more-than-ever

Bandclaircan

JOCK

P.S. P. 291. “ ‘ Why not,’ murmurs Leo. . . . ” Can *murmurs* ever be the *mot juste* for anything that dear goblin has to impart—he whose *sotto voce* is more alarming than any alarm-clock ?

P.P.S. You elect to write *whiskey* passim. It is an accepted fact that *whisky* is Scotch and *whiskey* Irish. Perhaps it doesn't matter—and perhaps the word won't have occasion to be used in *Ego 7* ?

I have replied :

DEAR JOCK,

That was a magnificent piece of fault-finding—and you've done it grandly !

I note that you dislike the references to my finances. Balzac would have doted on them ! Have you forgotten *César Birotteau* ?

“ Je puis m'en tirer, se dit Birotteau. Mon passif en effets à payer s'élève à deux cent trente-cinq mille francs, à savoir : soixantequinze mille francs pour ma maison, et cent soixantequinze mille francs pour les terrains. Or, pour suffire à ces payements, j'ai le dividende Roguin qui sera peut-être de cent mille francs, je puis faire annuler l'emprunt sur mes terrains, en tout cent quarante. Il s'agit de gagner cent mille francs avec *l'huile céphalique*. . . . ”

I could read this stuff for hours. Now, Birotteau's difficulties were *imaginary*, mine are *real* ; and the way I have pulled them round exceeds anything Balzac records ! Of

course I could have done it by retiring and going to live at Piddle-in-the-Pool. You, my dear Jock, know nothing about this sort of thing. You have never earned enough money to get into debt.

*Re the Marchioness.* Here you are entirely justified. This was just dam' careless writing, though I suspect a core of ignorance, as when Jules Janin called the lobster "the cardinal of the sea."

About the misogyny. Because Fanny Davies could play a Mozart concerto well, do you want to see a woman conduct the *Messiah*? Shade of Aimée McPherson! Or perform on the double-bass? Shade of Lady Jane! You are much too late in attempting to change my views about the sex. I know only six women in my immediate circle that I ever want to have another intellectual *tête-à-tête* with. (I have tried to think of a seventh, but can't make it.) Just cannot be bothered talking to women who mess about with their faces while pretending to listen. But then, even in Shakespeare there are only six tolerable women—Lady Macbeth, Goneril, Regan, the old hag Queen Margaret in *Richard III*, Cleopatra, and Mistress Quickly. As for the others—Rosalind with her vanity, Beatrice with her archness, Portia with her pretentiousness, Helena in *All's Well*, odiously like Shaw's Ann Whitefield, Desdemona with her imbecility, Cordelia with her lack of gumption, Constance with her habit of sitting on the ground, the wilting Viola, and the maddeningly dumb Ophelia—all these drive me into hysterics.

*Re Hamlet's "Give me that man."* My authorities are the Cambridge Shakespeare, edited by Aldis Wright, and Bartlett's *Concordance to Shakespeare*. So sucks to you, as we used to say at school.

Ever,  
JAMIE

*June 17 Saturday.* When a man tells me over the dinner-table that the moon is made of green cheese I smile and tell him about a green cheese I once met that was made of moon. But he must not tell me this seriously, as an astronomer, in the columns of the *Evening Asteroid*. To-night's *Evening Standard* contains this statement by its accredited critic, Beverley Baxter: "Throughout the ages the critics have always fought against the play of ideas." This staggering pronouncement can only mean that the public has always had a natural inclination towards the intellectual drama and would

always have given rein to this inclination had it not been for the critics shooing them away from the theatres where such plays were performed and urging the superior attractions of dramas of the order of *Up in Mabel's Room* or *Getting Gertie's Garter*. "Il faut arriver d'Afrique pour avoir cette idée-là," says Olivier de Jalin, in Dumas' *Le Demi-Monde*. Heaven knows in what continent Baxter can have picked up his extraordinary notion.

*June 18*    Reviews of *Ego 6* are beginning to come in. Sydney *Sunday*. Carroll (two inches in the *Daily Sketch*) thinks I must be the greatest living authority on Hackney stallions ! The *Sunday Times* (three inches) holds that my "monetary affairs continue to be based on mathematical principles unknown to other men." Why not say that since the war I have paid off 95 per cent. of my debts according to mathematical principles perfectly well known to Stanley Rubinstein ?

#### Trouvailles

SIR,

I don't suppose we shall get anywhere if we argue about the supposed happiness or unhappiness of heifers who are artificially inseminated, for that is not a subject upon which it is possible for us to have exact knowledge. If I were in Mrs Clay's position, and as fully persuaded as she is that only by this rather foul business could I build up a first-class milking herd, I suppose I should use it. I should argue that people are more important than cattle, and that the plentiful production of good milk is a good which outweighs the repulsiveness of this method of producing the necessary calves. But unlike her I should be miserable about it, and all the time I should have a feeling that this sort of thing would be certain somehow and some day to bring about some disconcerting and very nasty result. Anyway, I'm sure Mrs Clay is wrong when she calls it a godsend. I simply don't believe that God sent it. I think it was much more likely one of these confounded scientists, from whose cleverness good Lord deliver us.

I am, etc.,  
HUMANITARIAN

*Letter in "Time and Tide"*

June 20 Even at a concert my obsession will not leave me  
*Tuesday.* alone. At the Proms to-night I found myself reflecting that if I had been doing the programme notes in place of Alec Robertson I should have either (a) refrained from quoting the "age cannot wither" tag or (b) quoted it correctly. I was very anxious to hear the Scriabin Piano Concerto, with which I have been in love since hearing it on the wireless. I now know why none of the virtuoso pianists will play it. This is because it is in fact a *concerto*, and not merely a solo for piano with orchestral accompaniment. Several pianists have played bits of it to me, but they always shrugged their shoulders and dismissed it as second-hand Chopin. What they have really meant and didn't like to say was that there is as much beauty and effectiveness in the orchestral web as in the piano score. Pouishnoff played it very well, and it was worth sitting through that tawdry Liszt E flat Concerto which no virtuoso can keep his hands off. The programme also included the Dvořák No. 5 Symphony. Osbert Sitwell has a passage about the association of music with the other senses. I hope I don't henceforth associate the New World Symphony with the leathery smell of a huge yellow Army boot which an American soldier sitting immediately behind me maintained within three inches of my nose throughout !

June 21 The Agate-Lyttelton shuttle-service continues :  
*Wednesday.*

Warre House  
Eton College  
Windsor

June 19, 1944

DEAR JAMES AGATE,

Your generosity is really limitless. No wonder your books bring you little net profit, for you give them all away.

I have not had time to read a word of *Red Letter Nights* yet, but I make haste to record my deep gratitude, as any day one or both of us may be blown sky-high. It is hard to see what that man is aiming at in these parts unless it is Windsor Castle in mere malice ; and if the thirty or so that shook me in my bed last night were really aimed at you in Grape Street, he is hooking his shots badly. I do hope all is so far well with you, and that you have at least five fathom

of concrete above your head when you sleep. Your book accompanies me to the shelter to-night. Bless you !

Yours ever,  
GEORGE LYTTELTON

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*

*June 21st, 1944*

DEAR GEORGE LYTTELTON,

Thanks for your note. I think I have discovered a cure for raid-nervousness. This is to be found, like everything else, in Johnson. To be exact, in that letter which he wrote to Boswell one hundred years all but two days before I was born : "That distrust which intrudes so often on your mind is a mode of melancholy, which, if it be the business of a wise man to be happy, it is foolish to indulge ; and if it be a duty to preserve our faculties entire for their proper use, it is criminal." After all, the flying bomb is only another form of distrust leading to melancholy. I like the epitaph you have composed for me, though I think I prefer Johnson's remark to Beauclerk : "Thy body is all vice, and thy mind all virtue." You remember that when Beauclerk resented this Johnson went on to say, "Nay, Sir, Alexander the Great, marching in triumph into Babylon, could not have desired to have had more said to him." Talking of Johnson reminds me that my obsession has recently arrived at a point when I have had to call in philosophy. It seems that instead of waiting for misprints I have begun to anticipate them ! For example, returning last night from the Promenade Concert and overlooking the day's work, I found that I had written, "'He adorned nothing that he did not touch,' as Sir Joshua said of Garrick." At least Pavia maintains that this was what I dictated. "How could I have typed it if you hadn't said it ?" Pavia's argument is, of course, as unanswerable as Mr Justice Stareleigh's. But I drool.

Yours ever,  
JAMES AGATE

June 24 My recollections of the last forty-eight hours are Saturday. as follows. Of a bomb falling some eighty yards away in Drury Lane, and Leo immediately attacking the Chopin B minor Scherzo, saying, "I'm not like your Lady Ridgeley. It is to Chopin and the pianoforte that I turn for healing and consolation ! " . . . Of Trefor Jones insisting that the *Largo* is the best thing Handel ever laid out for the

voice, and of my saying : " My dear boy, it's absolutely *Ombra mai fu'l-proof!* " . . . Of a snatch of talk overheard in my shelter at about 4 A.M. this morning, the speakers being a niece of Elliot Mason and a Scotch friend. One said, " I feel like a shelter-drawing by Feliks Topolski." The other replied, " My dear, I feel worse—I feel like a shelter-drawing by Henry Moore ! " . . . Of throwing together an article for the *Express* on the subject of bad writing, and inventing this as an example :

Of something less than middle age and something more than middle height, Geoffrey Scadder stood shivering in the bleak February wind and the thin dress trousers he had donned in honour of her late Majesty Queen Victoria, with whose demise our story opens. . . .

Of dining with an important official at the Ministry of Food who told me that when a troop train is due to arrive at, say, ten o'clock, a mobile military canteen meets it, but if the train is more than an hour late it packs up and departs. That this has happened several times in his district and in each case my friend has brought his own civilian canteen into action, and has been *officially rebuked by military authority for interfering with Army arrangements.* That in his experience and opinion the British Regular Army officer is, outside the battlefield, Nature's dumbest creation. . . . Of an addition to what must already be the worst collection of pictures in London—our lot at the Savage Club. (Heavens, how I have talked to keep the eyes of visitors on me, and away from the walls !) This time it is a portrait of Henry Wood—pretty, tasteful, artless, competent, undistinguished, dull, and flattering like a camera-study, except that Angus McBean would cut his throat rather than produce anything so characterless. . . . Of a note from Norman Collins, acknowledging the receipt of *Ego 6*, and talking about " the prodigious standard," and ending : " You, Flaubert, and the *New Yorker* are my favourite reading. . . ." Of another from Cookman, of *The Times*, in which he says : " If Montague happened to send you his *Dramatic Values* you know, roughly, how I feel about your gift of *Red Letter Nights*. Envy, of course, but the noblest sort of envy. The sort which stimulates pride of craft."

*June 25* At the Café Royal met John Barrington, the young *Sunday.* man of the amazing handwriting. Said he didn't think life was worth the nervous strain entailed in going out of one's way to preserve it! I gathered that he would be perfectly prepared to invent whatever is necessary to counteract the flying bomb, except that he is busy making an abstract film à la Walt Disney illustrating somebody's theory that the universe is not expanding but contracting.

*June 26 Red Letter Nights* published.  
*Monday.* Letter to Jock :

DEAR JOCK,

I am now the proud possessor of another of B. Lillie's hats, an inverted, brick-red flower-pot with a tassel. Made of paper, and looks as though it had come out of a cracker. This treasure now hangs on a picture-frame from which I propose to take it down from time to time and wear it as a smoking-cap! She gave it me in a coach ploughing through Oxfordshire at two o'clock this morning, some of the other artists being Judy Campbell, Jill Furse, John Clements, your friend Avice Landone, and my friend Michael Shepley. They had been doing a revue at the big aerodrome at Benson, and I had taken a busman's holiday. I confess to a thrill on being told at lunch that I was sitting next to an airman who that morning had flown to Augsburg and back, while opposite me was a young man who was about to take off for the Mediterranean, and would be home again in time for dinner!

What do you think of this in a letter from James Bridie?

"I think you gain in mastery of a medium you have had the honour of inventing for yourself. It is silly to mix you up with Pepys. Pepys was not an artist. You have perfected an instrument for which that very great artist, Jas. Boswell, was feeling all his life. He only created Johnson because he hadn't the guts to create Boswell or the luck to find out how to do it. That is a very funny thing about the English. They blunder about a good deal, but every now and again they turn out something original, small perhaps but perfect and unique. It is not a matter of native wit. They have, of course, thousands of casuals who reach immortality by chance. But Herrick, Sterne, De Quincey, Lewis Carroll, Lear, Sam Butler were not casuals. They each consciously did something that had never been done before. It

is interesting to find in the new *Ego* that you realise that you yourself are a specialist, like Chevalier Jackson, the greatest of all throat and nose specialists, who devoted most of his life to taking peanuts out of children's bronchial tubes. I think that even your undoubted eminence as an essayist and your reputation as a dramatic critic hardly count as more than blundering compared with your real achievement. I congratulate you."

I agree. Whoever thinks Agate the critic will outlive Agate the diarist is a prize ass.

No more at the moment.

Ever your  
JAMIE

### *Trouvailles*

He had the most voluptuous lips in Nottinghamshire.

LESLIE ROBERTS, *Feathers in the Bed*

*June 27* Delighted to read the following in to-day's *News Tuesday. Chronicle*:

The biggest literary hoax ever perpetrated in Australia was disclosed when two Australian soldiers proved that they were the authors of poems by "Ern Malley," who had been hailed by the Adelaide intelligentsia as a great Australian poet. When Cpl. Harold Stewart and Lt. James M'Auley, former students of Sydney University, disclosed that they had written the poems, they said they did so deliberately to test critical discrimination of the poetry of such schools as are represented in Australia by "Angry Penguins," and in England by the "New Apocalypse" school, exemplified by Dylan Thomas and Henry Treece. Stewart says that the first three lines of a poem, *Culture as Exhibit*, were lifted straight from an American report on the drainage of mosquitoes' breeding-grounds.

To-day arrives *Air Force Poetry*, edited by John Pudney and Henry Treece. I cull the following from a poem by R. F. W. Grindal, entitled *Yes, My Love*:

How often

will terror twist the juice chord? clutch .  
 the cod's eye, which you as a boy  
 threw round the room, and sink  
 five fathoms soundlessly.

Lifted from a memorandum issued by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries?

*June 28* A slight breeze with the B.B.C. in connection with *Wednesday*. my broadcast in the Forces programme about the revival of Korda's *Lady Hamilton*. B.B.C. "Do you mind prefacing your talk with the statement that whereas you hold a high opinion of Nelson's seamanship you have a low one of his morals ?" J. A. "Yes, I mind very much." B.B.C. "But don't you realise, Mr Agate, that you are talking not only to the soldiers but also to their mothers and wives, who don't think that their sons and husbands should be told that women like Emma Hamilton exist ? Or that a woman such as you have drawn could ever be the mistress of a great national hero." J. A. "I don't care a damn what the mothers and wives of soldiers think." B.B.C. "Perhaps not, but we have to." J. A. "Then I shan't give the talk at all." Rings off. What was in my mind was something Stevenson wrote about Sir Richard Grenville of the *Revenge*, and how he declined to surrender to the Spaniards and ordered the ship to be scuttled. "Some one said to me the other day that they considered this story to be of a pestilent example. I am not inclined to imagine we shall ever be put into any practical difficulty from a superfluity of Grenvilles." And I am not inclined to imagine that this country will ever be put into any practical difficulty from a superfluity of Nelsons with mistresses like Emma Hamilton. But I just haven't time to read Stevenson's essays to B.B.C. officials concerned for the morals of the British fighting man. Presently Norman Collins intervenes, and I consent to say that while the film presents an idealised view of Emma, there is also a realistic view which I propose to put forward whether the moralists approve or not. Here are two bits of the talk :

A few years ago I had to address several hundred Boy Scouts in a field near Uxbridge with a Bishop in the chair. I told the boys that on the previous afternoon I had been present at a ceremony at which those pillars of respectability, Dame Madge Kendal and Sir Frank Benson, had laid a wreath at the foot of a statue erected to a man who had died of drink ! That those two great artists were amply justified. That the original of the statue was the greatest of all English actors, Edmund Kean. That if a man is determined to drink himself to death, he redeems his folly to some extent if he also accomplishes some noble or great work. In other

words, if he contrives to be a great man. So with Nelson. He led a life of which the strict moralists of the day did not approve, but he also contrived to be England's greatest sailor.

And again :

Put on the screen the real story of Nelson and Lady Hamilton, and the great British public would be knocked sideways. That public just isn't capable of realising that a great painter like J. M. W. Turner can want to keep house with a blowsy slattern. It is prepared to excuse and forgive erring genius only if it approves erring genius's choice, some nitwit blonde plastered with make-up, or soulful brunette with a habit of scampering all over the place with her arms full of arum lilies.

*June 29*      The cry is still, "They come." Letter from Leeds *Thursday*, informing me that the trumpets which sounded on the other side were *not* for Christian, as I say in *Ego 5*, but for Mr Valiant-for-Truth. Which, of course, I knew. Rank carelessness—the thing I most abominate.

Temper slightly restored on being told by Jonathan Cape, who gave me an excellent lunch at the Etoile in Charlotte Street together with a totally unexpected cheque for £75, that he had sold out the entire edition of five thousand copies of *Red Letter Nights*. Temper completely restored by reading Elizabeth Bowen's review of *Ego 6* in the *Tatler*:

One could wish that Mr Agate had lived at a time when one did not need to chronicle so much small beer. As it is, he gives the effect of solitary, feroeious grandeur in a declining world.

*June 30*      In my study hangs a colour-print of a picture by *Friday*. Lionel Edwards. It is called "School-days," and it shows a young farmer lunging a colt that looks like a Hackney. What thoughts are we to suppose are in the mind of John Giles as he stands in the middle of the field and watches his charge on its endless orbit? Nine-tenths of his thoughts are for the animal, since Katawampus—for so I name the colt—has brains and knows as well as any schoolboy when his master is not attending. Therefore will not Giles let more

than one-tenth of his mind wander lest the colt desist from studying, when all his master's work will be wasted. It must be confessed that in the matter of Giles's remainder thoughts they are largely unheeding. He has seen those two beech-trees ever since he was a boy, and that they are beautiful has never occurred to him. Neither is the barn, to him, picturesque. Of the loveliness of Surrey Giles is, by this time, careless; he has seen too much of it. Nor does the beauty of soil preoccupy our friend. The lines:

Then we two  
On the low earth shall prosper hand in hand  
In odours of the open field, and live  
In peaceful noises of the farm, and watch  
The pastoral fields burned by the setting sun

may be pretty verse, but it is verse for town-dwellers. If Giles thinks of his acres at all it is to wonder whether that bit on the other side of the road had not better be got ready for turnips.

That we  
Leisurely stooping, and with each slow step,  
May curiously inspect our lasting home

is also not within our friend's philosophy. Nor is there any of this fudge in Katawampus's mind. What that healthy quadruped is thinking is "Blimey!" (or its equine equivalent) "Either it's dinner-time or there's something seriously wrong with my belly!"

Giles knows that as he sows so shall he reap, but he also realises that with the more complicated works of God things are not so simple. The seed, being sown, cannot help itself; but a horse, being foaled, can help itself and does. And to all manner of things—to carriage and manners and high courage and blue ribands, or to sluggishness and temper and kicking over traces and feeling sorry for itself at the wrong moment. A sculptor has only to go on chipping away at his marble for the work to take shape. A writer has only to continue tinkering, and the novel, or poem, or whatever it may be, will come right. In these matters pains are all. But your horseman may take all the pains in the world and find, at the end, that what he has laboured to produce is not there. Perhaps it never was there. For the essence of horsemanship is not putting qualities

into an animal but getting out of that animal such qualities as it possesses. You cannot get gold out of a mine in which no gold is. Here, then, lie the glamour and fascination of horse-breeding, training, showing. Giles is up against all the contrariness of Nature. But so, too, is my lord at the Hall. For his lordship as for Giles, every animal in his stud is a dark horse.

Now suppose that Katawampus shows signs of putting his knee in the right place, of flexing his hocks, and wearing himself as a harness champion ought to. Suppose he goes like that little marvel, Eastertide, by Southworth Swell out of Hollin Glow Worm, by Torchfire. (What joy to be writing the old names again !) This wonderful little mare, the finest goer I have ever seen, was first shown by my old friend, the late W. S. Miller, who sold her to Macy Willets, the American fancier. I saw the pony when I visited the stud at New Marlboro during my American visit of 1937. What, in the event of Katawampus turning out to be another Eastertide, is Giles going to do ? For news of a good horse or a good pony cannot be kept secret, and there are those prowling around the country whose business it is to convey Katawampus to those elegant and expensive stables from which it is held fitting and proper that an Olympia champion should emerge. Will Katawampus's owner sell ? From this moment Giles is in clover. Like all true horsemen he loves a deal, as much for the pleasure of dealing as for the money. For weeks the telegraph wires to his village post-office will be sizzling-hot with the alarums and excursions proper to horse-coping ; and if Giles is a wise man the telegrams will be all one way, since nothing excites a buyer's appetite more than the suspicion that the seller isn't hungry. If Giles is an even wiser man he will himself bring out the gelding which the colt has now become. And if Katawampus is the animal we are taking him for, what a scene will there be as he carries the blue riband head-high out of the ring at the Breed Show ! Now will they gather round Giles. Millionaires will extend their greedy hands and draw him into confabulation. Either Giles strikes while the iron is hot, or waits till it gets hotter. If he sells, be sure he will regret it ; he has received money, lots of money perhaps, but he has parted with a work of art.

"Very fine, your Pastoral Symphony!" says the reader, "But pray, what is it in honour of?" Merely this, that at to-day's Extraordinary Meeting of the Hackney Horse Society, which I joined exactly a third of a century ago, I was, by unanimous vote, made President-Elect.

*July 3* George Bishop writes in the *Daily Telegraph* :  
*Monday*.

Mr Agate would be wisely advised to discontinue publishing his volumes of *Ego*. . . . The novelty of the author's preoccupation with his debts, the merits and demerits of his secretaries, his discovery of prodigies, his horses, his passions and prejudices, is wearing a trifle thin. . . . If he goes on issuing his diaries there is the risk that Mr Agate will repeat himself even more than he has done.

Which suggests yet another little rhyme :

Mr Bishop  
Thinks I shouldn't dish up  
Stuff about Max or any kind of Bax ; Bauchpresser, Bridie, Brown  
(Ivor, Mason, or Pamela) ; Carroll (Lewis, Paul, or Sydney),  
Cooper (Gary or Gladys) ; Glegud, Glock, Gray (Sally or  
Monsewer) ; Hess (Myra or Rudolf) ; Joad, Jock ; Katzchgebiss,  
Kligerman, Korda ; Maisky, Mayakovsky, Moiseiwitsch ; Pavia,  
Paxinou, Priestley ; Richards, Robey, Rubinstein (*not* the pianist) ;  
Sitwell (Edith, Osbert, or Sacheverell), Smith (Aubrey, Charles, or  
E. J.) ; Topolski, Ustinov, and Yavorska :  
He's heard it all bevorska.

This will teach our powerful thinkers and master stylists that there is no percentage, as Damon Runyon would say, in Agate-baiting.

*July 5* Letter from a boy in the Air Force at Scarborough *Wednesday*. saying he is going into the town on Saturday to lay out 18s. on a copy of *Ego* 6, and do I not think this is pretty good out of a fortnightly wage of twenty-six shillings? I do indeed, and ring up Harrap's for a copy. Not one left. Rush round to Hatchard's and Bumpus's, and draw blank at both places. Am using the boy's letter as a lever to Harrap's to reprint.

Odd how people react differently to the air nuisance. I admit to losing no time, this afternoon, in getting from the taxi to my flat, in view of the fact that there was something making a

nasty noise overhead. Even so, I remarked that the Air Force corporal standing at the corner of the street was practising Naunton Wayne's trick with the vanishing thimbles totally oblivious of everything else.

Letter from Sir Ronald Storrs :

*The Mill House  
Pembmarsh  
Essex*

I. VII. 44

DEAR MR AGATE.—A word of thanks for *Ego* 6; palliated if not excused by our meet<sup>g</sup> once at Hugh Walpole's, and perhaps by my occasional service with you on the *S.T.*

Not only the *super-compr<sup>d</sup>*, high vitality—you are licensed to carry 10 or a doz. more *Ego*'s—and the pervadg<sup>s</sup>, convinc<sup>s</sup> sense as well as the sensibility, but of course the pulse fun.

Beside that, and personal to me, yr love for Damon Runyon, your definit<sup>a</sup> of boredom, yr detestat<sup>a</sup> of *balletomanes*—escapists from artistic reason & definit<sup>a</sup>—combined with yr like of ballet. (Mussolini's only good say<sup>g</sup>: "I love animals, and detest animal-lovers.") Above & beyond all the sublime Katzengebiss episode.

Pray don't bother to ack<sup>e</sup>, either yrselv or through L. P.

Yrs sincerely,  
RONALD STORES

P.S. The Moujik-sturgeon crack—I think is from *Le Bois Sacré*. And do you really consult *Webster* when you cd use the (2 vol) *Oxfd Eng Dict*"?

R. S.

In my reply I am telling Sir Ronald that I stick to my Webster because I bought it out of sixpences scraped together when I was a boy. That I have had it re-bound twice. Also that I faintly suspect the Oxford affair of being written in the Oxford accent.

Letter from Clifford Bax :

*D2, Albany, Piccadilly, W.1*  
*July 4, 44*

MY DEAR JAMES,

Admirable correspondent though you be, do not labour to reply to this note of gratitude and congratulation. I come just to say that, on my way to Lord's last Saturday, I passed a highbrow bookshop and saw in the centre of its window-

display, plumb in the eentre, *Ego* 6. With some remorse for having once annoyed with adverse critieism an old friend who (1) stands, on the whole, for everything that I champion, and (2) saw more in my work than any other professional critie could find, I bought *Ego* 6.

At Lord's we all rose twiee to watch the black eauliflowers of filthy smoke which mark the end of the new German toy, and then settled baek in our seats, and watched fifth-rate Australian bowlers and fielders make mincemeat of an English team which might (in 1939) have been called—at Scarborough—"An England XI." Ellis, left-hand slow, is a fine bowler.

Then came those bumble-bombs, and your book has been a delightful consolation during the small hours. If you had more sensibility and less bouncee, what an attractive man you would be. . . . The world (the reviewing world) hates me because I am a temperamental aristocrat: lots of people detest you because you have not my aloofness and my "despise" of the Little Man and Journalistic Cheapjacks. So—how difficult it is to be the Most Popular Boy in the School, isn't it! Who qualifies? Priestley? Coward? Not in the measure of Shaw, Wells, Barrie . . .

You would have amassed an even more notable autobiography if those two wars had not made first-rate work in the arts practically unattainable. Apart from me, what man has more or less produced the books, plays, poems, which he would have produced if the first half of this century had been more comfortable? My point is that your contemporaries have not been *quite* good enough for your diary.

Why do you (monstrous ehap!) omit Dryden as one of "the four leading Restoration dramatists"? I should have called him Restorationist No. 1.

Good luck to you, James, in this world and afterwards.

Super-refinedly,  
CLIFFORD BAX

To whieh I have replied :

MY DEAR CLIFFORD,

But consider where I should have been without "bouncee"! You are a born Londoner, your appearance is elegant, you have always known everybody, and you have always had money. With your talent and these advantages it would have been disgraceful if you had not made for yourself a place in English letters. Now consider my case. I am a

provincial of commonplace exterior who began his assault on London at the age of forty-one without a ha'penny and with no influence. Was I to make modesty trumps? No. I decided to put on the whole armour of Balzac, and not to make the mistake Goldsmith made when he tackled London "without friends, recommendation, money, or *impudence*."

Dryden? In case you have forgotten I am going to give Pavia the pleasure of copying out a few lines from the Preface to *All for Love*:

"I doubt not but the same motive has prevailed with us all in this attempt [to treat of the death of Antony and Cleopatra]; I mean the excellency of the moral; For the chief persons represented were famous patterns of unlawful love; and their end accordingly was unfortunate. . . . That which is wanting to work up the pity to a greater height, was not afforded me by the story; for the crimes of love, which they both committed, were not occasioned by any necessity, or fatal ignorance, but were wholly voluntary; since our passions are, or ought to be, within our power."

My dear Clifford, think again of "Let Rome in Tiber melt. . . ." In my opinion Dryden was worse than a dull dog; he was a prig. I have made it a rule to forget him whenever I can, and this seems to have been a successful occasion.

In the meantime I have to thank you for a letter about whose wilful elegance there is something extraordinarily pleasing. I have already read it three times; twice to myself, and once out loud.

Your very sincere  
JAMES

And I wind up a day of high spirits with a note to George Lyttelton:

Leo Pavia has started in on the game of misprints. One day last week he makes me write that a man has had his leg "umputated." On the next he makes me talk about an actress "sprouting" poetry. Next day a young farmer "lunches" a colt instead of lunging it. To-day he coins me a wonderful word for a purveyor of indecent literature—the word "publusher." If ever it falls to me to compose his epitaph I shall write that he "talked like an angel, but typed like poor Poll."

*July 9* Notices of *Ego 6* and *Red Letter Nights* are coming along fine. The *Times Lit. Supp.* has a most encouraging column about *Ego 6*. The sentence I like best is, perhaps : " Of engagements at which nothing good was said, and life teems with such engagements, nothing is said." Although this is run very closely by :

Comparing the naturalism of Leslie Howard with that of Gerald du Maurier, he contends that what du Maurier put on the stage was an urgent, heightened, theatrical presentation of Geraldism, whereas what Leslie sought to give was a subdued, abstract, non-theatrical precipitate of Howardism.

I hadn't remembered that I am as good a critic as that.

An excellent notice of *Red Letter Nights* in the *Spectator* :

He writes about Shakespeare, Chekhov, and Ibsen as our London charwomen and bus-conductors would write after seeing these authors' plays for the first time if they had a native genius for writing definite opinions, and complete confidence in them.

The *Observer* is even more flattering :

This book is a rich web of comparison and allusion. If one must choose from any of the articles one would take the sequence in which Mr Agate, with the minuteness of a Himalayan surveying-party, charts the highlands of Ibsen, and the pair in which he presents two plays of André Obey, *Le Viol de Lucrece* and *Bataille de la Marne*. Here he finely conveys to the reader his own excitement and the texture of writing and performance.

I couldn't be more pleased.

*July 10* My post-bag.  
*Monday.*

#### 1. From Clifford Bax :

Behold, where Dryden's less presumptuous car,  
Wide o'er the fields of Glory bear  
Two Couriers of ethereal race,  
With necks in thunder cloth'd, and long-resounding pace.

I am seriously grieved about your blindness to Dryden, as you will see when I send you my lecture on *Style and Fashion*. A near-great poet; the supreme English prosist :

and a penetrating critic who leaves your Montague panting—  
three laps behind.

Your admiring  
C. B.

2. From Dennis van Thal, Bertie's brother :

*New Barn Cottage  
Osborne  
Cowes  
Isle of Wight  
July 9th, 1944*

DEAR JIMMIE,

It's rarely I get an opportunity to listen to the radio these days, but I did hear your talk on *Lady Hamilton* exactly a week ago to-day, I think.

It was magnificent, in my humble opinion, and your delivery of it just as splendid. In fact, your personality comes over in a remarkable way : I don't know if it's *your* personality—but it's certainly a *big* personality. So much so, that I found myself wondering if it were not a waste of a great radio personality that you should be talking about something so completely unimportant as films. Not, of course, that you *were* talking about films !

Forgive these ramblings of a humble sailor ! Incidentally, I've another ring of gold paint since I last saw you.

Greetings,  
DENNIS

3. From an old friend :

*Ledbury  
Garratts Lane  
Banstead, Surrey  
July 9th, 1944*

DEAR MR AGATE,

Some time ago I challenged your accuracy in French. I write to make amends. I hold that the French language is brutally ill-used by English writers and printers. For example, I have a book of broadcast talks in French called *Paroles Africaines*. It has on the title-page the names of His Majesty's Stationery Office, the Air Ministry, and the Ministry of Information. There are nine errors in the first three pages.

I have recently read your *Ego 5* (for which I thank you), and in the whole of the French it contains only one error.

To get such accuracy through the press is a rare achievement,  
and I herewith raise my hat.

Yours truly,  
J. H. NEWBOLD

4. Airgraph from India :

I cannot wait to tell you that Y. Z., the esoteric young man we formerly saw at first-nights, came out here recently. You will be amused to learn that the signet ring which formerly adorned his little finger now embellishes a Maharajah's little toe !

5. Postcard from George Richards :

Motto for post-war London :

Où sont les nègres d'antan ?

6. From a lady in Wiltshire :

Is it not time another *Ego* emerged from its shell ? I find them most helpful during my confinements, and shall require a new volume for Christmas !

*July 11 Justice is Coming*—it ought to have been called *The Tuesday. Four Who Were Hanged*—the news-reel issued by the Soviet Film Agency which I saw to-night at the little Tatler Theatre, is entirely sickening and should be exhibited all over the country. The first scoundrel to be examined is Captain Wilhelm Langfeld, of the German Intelligence. To me he doesn't look the officer-type ; he is obviously uneducated and has none of the gloss which these swine use to cover up their brutality. He admits putting one hundred civilians to death. The next is Retzlaw Reinhardt, of the Gestapo. This precious fellow has a mouth like a shark, no chin, and a forehead straight out of Lombroso ; he admits to ordering the citizens of Kharkov into the van in which they were to be asphyxiated. The third is Lieutenant Hans Ritz, of the S.S. He is a blond, rather sheepish-looking young man who might be a shop assistant or something equally harmless ; we learn that he is a sadist of exquisite depravity who slaughtered women and children with his own hand. The fourth is one Michael Bulanov, who is a decent-looking fellow and might be mistaken for any Russian concert-pianist ; he

drove the murder-van. Well, of course they have got to hang, and they do hang. But their hanging leaves one with a sense of frustration. After all, they were only carrying out orders, and the highest in rank among them was only a captain. What we want to get at is the colonels and the generals and the people above colonels and generals. It never does to neglect Unser Shakespeare. Well, let us see what Unser Shakespeare has to say on the subject of people like Hitler and Himmler, Goering and Goebbels. The trouble is that they have only four lives between them, and one remembers Othello's

I would have him nine years a-killing.

And

Had all his hairs been lives, my great revenge  
Had stomach for them all.

And again

O, that the slave had forty thousand lives  
One is too poor, too weak for my revenge.

So I take another play of Shakespeare, and turn to the lines in which Macduff promises Macbeth his life :

Then yield thee, coward,  
And live to be the show and gaze o' the time :  
We'll have thee, as our rarer monsters are,  
Painted upon a pole, and underwrit,  
"Here may you see the tyrant."

My own way with the quartet would be to turn them into a travelling circus and send them round the once-occupied countries, each immured in a bullet-proof glass cage. These cages would have to be nicely warmed, because each of the quartet would be naked, with his uniform and decorations fastened to the glass at the back. Over the whole show would be emblazoned : "Here may you see the *Herrenvolk*!" The captives would be given plenty to eat and drink, but they would be compelled to listen, day in and day out, unceasingly, endlessly, to the torrents of their own eloquence reproduced by exceedingly loud speakers and diversified only by selections from *Mein Kampf* and the more idiotic bits of Nietzsche. The circus to be entirely managed, run, and policed by Jews. Here an even brighter idea strikes me. This is to send the circus, not to the once-occupied countries, but to Germany! It would be appropriate if it were to start from that beer-cellar in Munich.

*July 12* I find the following among to-day's mail :  
*Wednesday.*

45 Nibelung Road  
 Swiss Cottage, N.W.6

Juli 11, 1944

DEAR MR AGATE !

For you great News !! Of my Engagement to my dear Erasmus Glohwurm have you received already Notiz. Now with Pleasure will you learn that on the date of 25 Juli my Engaged and his Erna will become Married-ones. To this, the most dramatisch of my Works are you now invited to the first and only Performanz : at two o'clock by the Synagog to Belsize-park with our revered Rabbi Cheitz Feitelbaum who shall bind the Lovers together. After, a Togethermeeting of Relatifs and Friends at the Haus of Fr. Hilde Kruschen. We promise you some fine Delikatessen, some Wein from Palestina, and much Musik (Greta Goldheimer, Hugo Hundegebell and many Others.) Also shall we read in german and in englisch some new Plays.

In the Hope to see you I sign myself for the last time to you,

Respektfull,  
 ERNA KATZENGEBISS

*July 14* Letter to Pamela Brown :  
*Friday.*

MY DEAR PAMELA,

What's this about your wanting to play Marguerite Gautier? Garrick's widow is supposed to have said to Edmund Kean : "Sir, you are a very fine actor, but you cannot play Abel Drugger." Madam, you are a very clever actress, but you can no more play Marguerite than Sarah Bernhardt could have played Miss Prism ! Marguerite is the *courtisane sentimentale*, and there is not an ounce of sentimentality in your make-up ; suggestion of a knife-edge brain with a core of sentiment hidden away is something very different.

I beg you not to be another of the great ersatzists in the part, one more of those brilliant performers who have substituted something else and labelled the substitution Marguerite. Take warning by Duse, who turned Dumas' heroine into what Lemaitre described as "une grisette extrêmement distinguée et un peu préraphaëlite, une grisette de Botticelli." Never for one moment, he went on, could

you imagine this Marguerite " riant faux dans les soupers, allumant les hommes, s'appliquant à leur manger beaucoup d'argent." Duse just couldn't suggest this. She played the first and second acts, says the French critic, deliciously, but just as she would have played Juliet or Francesca da Rimini. During the last three acts she found it convenient to forget all about that little matter of Marguerite's profession. " Ce n'est plus que l'aventure très touchante de deux amants très malheureux, séparés on ne sait bien par quoi." And when old Duval put in an appearance all that the spectators saw was " une pensionnaire grondée par un vieux monsieur très imposant."

But then they have all come to grief, each in her different way. When Sarah gave Armand that camellia it was with the shyness of one unaccustomed to sincerity ; whereas Cécile Sorcl went through the motions of a statesman laying a wreath at the foot of a cenotaph. I won't bore you about Jane Hading-Gautier, who, as a wit of the period said, interpreted the part in terms of Sarahbesques ; about Nethersole-Gautier, Rubinstein-Gautier, Pitoëff-Gautier, Tallulah-Gautier, and even Garbo-Gautier. Do you imagine that your voice has the tones in which to half-sigh, half-murmur, " On nous abandonne, et les longues soirées succèdent aux longs jours " ? Can't you realise that as a relentless little realist of to-day you can have nothing in common with a demi-mondaine of a hundred years ago not only reclining upon plush but speaking it ? Can't you see that you will make nonsense of " On a toujours eu une enfance, quoi que l'on soit devenue," just because you will look like a child with your past still to come ? Hear my alternative suggestion. This is that you should tackle Meilhac and Halévy's *Froufrou*, a play with some, at least, of Dumas' sentimental quality, and a great deal more wit. You may not be able to wear a crinoline, but you can have a bustle, and in the first act you wear a riding-habit ! The story is all about a feather-brain who runs away from her too serious husband and dies of mingled T.B. and repentance. The part was first played by Aimée Desclée and later by Sarah and by Modjeska. Don't you know, dear Pamela, that you have the power of appearing extremely young ? Consider the impression you have to make on your audience at your first appearance. It is Valréas, your would-be lover, talking : " Froufrou ? Une porte qui s'ouvre, et, tout le long de l'escalier, un bruit de jupe qui glisse et descend comme un tourbillon . . . Froufrou. . . . Vous entrez, tournez, cherchez, furetez, rangez, dérangez, bavardez, boudez, riez, parlez, chantez, pianotez, sautez, dansez, et vous vous en allez,

Froufrou, toujours Froufrou. . . ." I know no actress on the stage to whom I would sooner say, "Squirlisez!"

I agree that the play dates, but I maintain that it dates much less than the Dumas play. The world of to-day contains no more Marguerites, but there are still plenty of Froufrous. Our best film actresses are always pretending to be a Froufrou of one kind or another. Turn my proposal down, my dear Pam, and Claudette Colbert will hear from me by the next mail!

Your devoted  
JAMES AGATE

*July 15* Letter from Ernest Helme, containing Assents to *Saturday*. and Dissents from *Ego* 6. Here are some of them :

*Page 36.* Leo Pavia's advice to young pianists on classical music is the finest I have ever read. "Let your presto be a moderato, but let your adagio approach andante." This was laid down by Ignaz Moseheles (Beethoven's own pupil and collaborator) to his pupils; among them was my grandmother, who assiduously followed this precept to the end of her life. I can recollect her playing trios on rare week-ends at Leyton (Essex) with Joachim and Piatti, who were in complete accordance with her; with the result that the renderings were effortless. *Rubinstein*. The greatest Titan among pianists caring nothing for technique. I only heard him once; he had the most superb touch, both piano and forte, I have ever heard. He could make the piano sing pianissimo, but the tone came right through; as to his fortissimo, produced entirely from his wrists—well, it was an avalanche of tone, glorious and not harsh. Unlike Paderewski, he never pounded from the shoulder. *Stavenhagen*. His technique and Sophie Menter's were probably the finest since Liszt; these two were the only pianists who could play Liszt's arrangement of Schubert's *Erlkönig* as Liszt had played it. I recollect a curious and interesting performance at the St James's Hall. Santley was the vocalist and Stavenhagen the pianist. Now Henry Bird was the habitual accompanist for singers at the Pops. Bird, whose father was the blind organist at the Old Parish Church, Walthamstow, was a meticulously careful, uninspired and uninspiring accompanist, and the *Erlkönig* as accompanied by him was just an *affaire manquée*; he just trickled correctly through its wave of passion. So Stavenhagen was announced to accompany Santley; excitement was keen, anticipation at fever-heat.

What happened ? Each of these great artists was so fearful of obtruding himself to the detriment of the other that the result was one of the tamest renderings imaginable. Stavenhagen had an ugly touch ; I believe he was the last pupil of Liszt ; personally I placed Sophie Menter above him.

*Page 38.* Hortense Schneider received her greatest ovation one evening when she limped on to the stage in *La Grande Duchesse* after receiving a kick from a horse at Auteuil. My parents were in the theatre that night and told me that her entry was the signal for a veritable furore ; her popularity was immense. Schneider's progress to the Bouffes down the Boulevards was always sensational, and the streets had to be cleared for her famous " *calèche* " with its team of white Egyptian mules.

*Page 39.* It is a great pity that Miss Durbin doesn't have her nice small voice properly trained ; it is really a mezzo-soprano of limited power and compass, and she is most ill-advised in her attempts (amateurish) to sing such numbers as " *Il Bacio*," etc. ; her high notes are shockingly produced, and already show signs of deterioration ; and her execution of florid passages is proof of lack of study.

*Page 51.* I think your summing-up of Marie Tempest is a masterpiece of fairness and balanced judgment. She idolised Jeanne Granier, and ran her own career on similar lines—Jeanne Granier played in Offenbach after the retirement of Judic, who succeeded Schneider ; later she took to farce and comedy. Marie Tempest was endowed with a much better voice, and had undergone a first-class training for grand opera. How exquisitely she opened and closed a door, moved across the stage, sat on a chair, went to the piano, etc.—what a lesson to the modern young actress, who when she sits down sprawls her long straggly legs all over the stage. I once watched Marie walking down Piccadilly on a sunny morning. She stopped to inspect Fortnum and Mason's window. It was a perfect performance.

*Page 95.* Your recognition of Mendelssohn is absolutely thrilling, and the last two and a half lines on this page are a *chef-d'œuvre*. I always call to mind Benson's production of the *Dream* one Christmas at the Globe Theatre ; it has never been surpassed and was a consummation of scholarly fairy-land. The music was exquisitely rendered, and Weir's Bottom the Weaver is still unrivalled in my humble opinion.

*Page 99.* The letter from Mrs O'Neill is so true ! True !

True ! The first pianist I ever heard play in public was Madame Schumann, who exemplified every word of it. I have never heard any pianist render Mendelssohn's " Songs Without Words " as she could. She was not a good Chopin player, but then I do not think I have ever heard a woman pianist who was. With the possible exception of Essipoff. [Leo utterly disagrees with this. He says Essipoff, when she played Chopin, clumped about like a cart-horse. J. A.]

*Page 165. Norman Neruda.* I always idolised her as a violinist, and bracket her with Sarasate as No. 1 ; Heifetz and Marie Hallé in that Mendelssohn Concerto soared to celestial realms, and her luscious tone in the highest flights in the final movement never became thin or squeaky like the much- and over-vaunted Yehudi Menuhin. One can never forget the exquisite grace of that beautiful bowing-arm so cleverly displayed to her public. I always placed the Hallé in the front rank of the English orchestras ; and I find it curious that old Charles, who, like Arabella Goddard, was a pedantic, anaemic, meticulously correct pianist, should have been a brilliant and fiery conductor. How fine, too, was Hans Richter, behind whose broad back I have sat so many nights at Covent Garden. Do you know, James, the back of *your* neck when I have sat behind you on a first-night always recalls Richter to me, and most of all when you are contemplating writing something particularly seathing.

*Page 166. Knight's paragraph on Genius* is one of the most complete, most true epitomes ever put to paper. " Shut it like domestic cattle in a pen " recalls old Dolores Sanz, the sister of the famous Eleana Sanz, the great Spanish singer whom Saint-Saëns regarded as his ideal Delilah. Old Dolores once said, and so truly : " Ces artistes (regardez ma sœur ! !) sitôt qu'elles quittent le théâtre, il faut les renfermer dans une cage et les laisser suspendues en l'air jusqu'au commencement de leur représentation prochaine."

*Page 199. Figurez-vous any producer telling Irving how to show infirmity of purpose—God help us !*

Just as I finish reading a very long letter the telephone rings. It is to tell me that Harrap's have decided to put in hand a second impression of *Ego 6*. This will enable me to correct the slips which have been so worrying. " You know, of course," grunts Leo, to whom I am dictating this, " that in *Buzz, Buzz !* you write of Hilda *Solness*, whereas you obviously mean Hilda

*Wangel?*" I reply with some show of firmness that I am not going to bother about howlers dating back to 1917!

*Trouvailles*

Lord of sweet Music and of Langham Place.

THE POET LAUREATE, *on Sir Henry Wood*

*July 16* To my dismay, William Glock is on holiday from the *Sunday Observer*. Just as Hazlitt delighted in "Slender and his friend Sackerson and his book of songs," so I dote on Glock and his friends Byrd and Wilbye and Weelkes and their books of madrigals. In the meantime his second string, "T. E. B.," doesn't do badly :

The beauty of the Bruckner Fourth is, in a sense, not the beauty of art at all but the beauty of undisciplined Nature. Dull stretches must sometimes be traversed in the Bruckner landscape before the genius of the place enters the mind and casts its spell over the spirit. Judged in isolation—or by the neater and more ordered standards of a municipal park—these patches appear to lack any sort of point or distinction. Then certainly Bruckner seems verbose to the point of dulness. But live with the music long enough, and there comes a time (or there does not, for it is all a matter of personal taste) when the monotony of Bruckner becomes as satisfying as the monotonies of Nature—a brook's ripple, the rustle of leaves, the tides' ebb and flow. It is no longer boring, but curiously restful and refreshing.

I see. All Wordsworth's *Excursion* is delightful because parts of Essex are dreary! "T. E. B." tells us that "when at length the movement ended (for the fifth time) the B.B.C. announcer declared, without producing a shred of evidence, that the work I had just been listening to was Mahler's Second Symphony." But then nothing in a B.B.C. announcer surprises me. Only last week I heard one of them say, "The Germans have now successfully occupied Vilna, and only mopping-up operations remain." Then, in an amused tone, he corrected himself : "Sorry. It's the Russians who have occupied Vilna !! "

*July 17* A parallel. From Maupassant's *Mademoiselle Fifi Monday*. (the nickname of le marquis Wilhem d'Eyrik, serving with the Prussians in '70 and in occupation of the château of le comte Fernand d'Amoys d'Uville) :

Aux murailles pendaient des toiles, des dessins et des

aquarelles de prix, tandis que sur les meubles, les étagères, et dans les vitrines élégantes, mille bibelots, des potiches, des statuettes, des bonshommes de Saxe et des magots de Chine, des ivoires anciens et des verres de Venise, peuplaient le vaste appartement de leur foule précieuse et bizarre.

Il n'en restait guère maintenant. Non qu'on les eût pillés, le major comte de Farlsberg ne l'aurait point permis ; mais Mlle Fifi, de temps en temps, faisait la *mine*, et tous les officiers, ce jour-là, s'amusaient vraiment pendant cinq minutes.

Le petit marquis alla chercher dans le salon ce qu'il lui fallait. Il rapporta une toute mignonne théière de Chine famille rose qu'il emplit de poudre à canon, et, par le bec, il introduisit délicatement un long morceau d'amadou, l'alluma, et courut reporter cette machine infernale dans l'appartement voisin.

Puis il revint bien vite, en fermant la porte. Tous les Allemands attendaient, debout, avec la figure souriante d'une curiosité enfantine ; et, dès que l'explosion eut secoué le château, ils se précipitèrent ensemble.

Mlle Fifi, entrée la première, battait des mains avec délice devant une Vénus de terre cuite dont la tête avait enfin sauté ; et chacun ramassa des morceaux de porcelaine, s'étonnant aux dentelles étranges des éclats, examinant les dégâts nouveaux, contestant certains ravages comme produits par l'explosion précédente ; et le major considérait d'un air paternel le vaste salon bouleversé par cette mitraille à la Néron et sablé de débris d'objets d'art. Il en sortit le premier, en déclarant avec bonhomie : "Ça a bien réussi, cette fois."

From *The Times'* account of last week's massacre at Oradour-sur-Glane, near Limoges :

Then the women and children were ordered inside the church, where some boys and girls were being prepared for their first communion. The S.S. troops made another round of the houses ; schoolchildren and their teachers were driven to the church ; several people who were in hiding from the terror were dragged out and if they resisted were shot out of hand. A young mother was forced into the church ; a soldier carried her eight-day-old baby in its cradle. Troops deposited a large case in the church and closed the doors on the unhappy inhabitants inside. An hour later the case exploded.

And I have no doubt that the S.S. commander declared *avec bonhomie*, "Diesmal ist es wohl gelungen."

1944]

EGO 7

July 18 Letter from Northampton :  
*Tuesday.*

86 *Alcombe Road*  
*Northampton*  
*July 14th, 1944*

DEAR MR AGATE,

I am just reading *Ego* 6 and have arrived at page 209. I hope the day is far distant when the committee you have appointed will advise you of any falling-off in your literary efforts. But if they should do so, do you really suppose you would accept their verdict ?

The idea is too reminiscent of Gil Blas's experience with the Archbishop of Granada. You will recall that he was employed by that eloquent prelate as private secretary, and was solemnly enjoined to do just what you have asked Jock, George Mathew, and Brother Mycroft to do. When, however, the hapless youth ventured a timid criticism he was incontinently turned into the street, with these words of the offended dignitary in his ears :

“Apprenez que je n'ai jamais composé de meilleure homélie que celle qui a le malheur de n'avoir pas votre approbation. Mon esprit, grâce au ciel, n'a rien encore perdu de sa vigueur : désormais je choisirai mieux mes confidents.”

May you continue to write for the general delectation for many years to come.

Yours faithfully,  
A. HOLTON

Also this :

*Ferny Ride*  
*Virginia Water*  
*Surrey*  
*July 16th, 1944*

DEAR MR AGATE,

Ashley Dukes in his letter to you on Henry Becque quotes four lines of verse found among the latter's papers after he died. My father knew a friend of his—he sympathised with Becque on the loss of his mistress and received the lines quoted, written on a menu-card ! They went on—if it interests you or Mr Dukes, or indeed anyone—as follows :

J'étais brutal et langoureux,  
Elle était ardente et cruelle ;  
Amour d'un amant malheureux  
Pour une maîtresse infidèle.

Un jour nous nous sommes séparés  
 Après tant de baisers,  
 Tant de joies, et tant de larmes,

Comme deux ennemis rompus  
 Que la haine ne soutient plus,  
 Et qui laissent tomber leurs armes.

With many thanks to you for happy hours spent with  
 your *Ego* 6,

Yours sincerely,  
 MARJORIE BATTINE

*July 19* Many people think it was Arthur Symons who *Wednesday*. started the guff about Duse. They are wrong. It was Eleonora herself who started it. Here is some of her table-talk :

To save the theatre, the theatre must be destroyed, the actors and actresses must all die of the plague. They poison the air, they make art impossible. It is not drama that they play, but pieces for the theatre. . . . Ibsen ? Ibsen is like this room where we are sitting, with all the tables and chairs. Do I care whether you have twenty or twenty-five links on your chain ? Hedda Gabler, Nora, and the rest : it is not that I want ! I want Rome and the Coliseum, the Acropolis, Athens ; I want beauty, and the flame of life. . . . I act because I would rather do other things. If I had my will I would live in a ship on the sea, and never come nearer to humanity than that. . . . The one happiness is to shut one's door upon a little room, with a table before one, and to create ; to create life in that isolation from life. . . .

All this gave Arthur Symons a handle, and from that moment Duse was his barrel-organ.

The reason why Duse is the greatest actress in the world is that she has a more subtle nature than any other actress, and that she expresses her nature more simply. All her acting seems to come from a great depth, and to be only half-telling profound secrets. No play has ever been profound enough, and simple enough, for this woman to say everything she has to say in it. . . . When she is on the stage she does not appeal to us with the conscious rhetoric of the actress ; she lets us overlook her, with an unconsciousness which study has formed into a second nature. . . . To act as Duse acts, with an art which is properly the antithesis of what we call acting, is, no doubt, to fail in a lesser thing in order to triumph

in a greater. . . . Duse's art is like the art of Verlaine in French poetry ; always suggestion, never statement, always a renunciation.

So there you have it. An actress who acts because she wants to do something else. An actress who thinks the best way of acting is not to act. An actress who will sweep Marguerite, Magda, Paula Tanqueray, off the boards and substitute her ineffable self. The same with Mrs Alving, whose whole attitude to Pastor Manders may be summed up in three words—" Stuff and nonsense ! " Duse was incapable of saying this to anybody. She was too busy putting over her own stuff and her own nonsense.

July 20      Letter from Pamela Brown :  
Thursday.

86 Soho Square, W. 1

July 18th, 1944

DEAR MR AGATE,

A most spirited management, the Cambridge Arts Theatre Trust, are anxious to present *La Dame aux Camélias* (with me in it), to be directed by Norman Marshall. He has always wanted to produce it, as I have to play in it : so we seem all set for good adventure.

But you are against it.

I think the memories of actresses who have played Marguerite Gautier have a little fogged Dumas' original conception of the character. May I quote him a little, a very little ? " Elle avait vingt ans." Well, you say, I have " the power of appearing extremely young." All right. But you also say, " You would look like a child with your past still to come." This delights me because it's an almost exact description of Marguerite. " On voyait qu'elle était encore à la virginité du vice." . . . " On reconnaissait dans cette fille la vierge qu'un rien avait faite courtisane, et la courtisane dont un rien eût fait la vierge la plus amoureuse et la plus pure."

There she is : her seductive charm lay in her virgin appearance, however lewd her speech " riant faux dans les soupers." Sentimentality ? I think I know why you say " There is not one ounce of sentimentality in your nature." It is because there wasn't any in my Ophelia ; and that there should have been, I quite agree. I was a rotten Ophelia.

Anthony Holland, the designer, and I planned a production of *La Dame* five years ago at Oxford, but the war intervened.

During odd bits of leave from the R.A.F. he has worked out a simplified setting, practicable for 1944. So let me have a shot at it anyhow. I think *Froufrou* sounds a delicious idea, and I have this morning procured a copy from the London Library (now again open) and look forward to doing it—Claudette Colbert permitting.

Love from  
PAM

I have replied :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*

*July 19th, 1944*

DEAR PAM,

What a lovely letter ! I shall give it a treasured place in *Ego 7*; for which I have ordered from Tunbridge-Sedgwick a beautiful photograph of your wide-awake little mug. This is the phrase Sarcey used for Réjane. "Petite frimousse éveillée" sounds better.

You make a very good case for your child Marguerite, and I have no doubt that was Dumas' intention. But I doubt whether he brought it off in the play. Take the speech in the second act :

"Nous paraissions heureuses, et l'on nous envie. En effet, nous avons des amants qui se ruinent, non pas pour nous, comme ils le disent, mais pour leur vanité. Nous sommes les premières dans leur amour-propre, les dernières dans leur estime. Nous avons des amis, des amis comme Prudence, dont l'amitié va jusqu'à la servitude, jamais jusqu'au désintéressement. Peu leur importe ce que nous faisons, pourvu qu'on les voie dans nos loges, ou qu'elles se carrent dans nos voitures. Ainsi, tout autour de nous, ruine, honte et mensonge."

These are not the thoughts of the girl of twenty who is still finding life full of fun, but of the woman of thirty who finds that the fun of that particular way of life begins to pall. Then again that speech in the third act :

"Ainsi, quoi qu'elle fasse, la créature tombée ne se relèvera jamais ! Dieu lui pardonnera peut-être, mais le monde sera inflexible !"

I just cannot feel that any young woman thinks of herself as a "créature tombée." But then again I may be wrong, and you may be right in thinking that I am a little betrayed by the Marguerites I have seen, all of whom have been fully grown women. (I wonder how old Doche was when she created the part?) Shall we put it this way—that I shall be

extremely interested to see your Marguerite. And then what will happen? You will have done the spade-work, after which that astute little Jewess, the Bergner, will come and clean up.

No, your Ophelia was not rotten. It was a fine performance of the wrong thing. The poor wretch, you remember, turned everything, affliction, passion, hell itself, "to favour and to prettiness." Pray, what did you turn it to?

By the way, I think our not meeting is charming. I still see you enthroned on that rickety chair on the stage of that Oxford theatre, very tiny, and endeavouring to conceal shyness by an imperiousness that would have put to shame Cleopatra, Queen Elizabeth, and the Empress Catherine of Russia! The aloofness repeats the Shaw-Campbell, Shaw-Terry pattern. Anyhow, doubt that the stars are fire, doubt that the sun doth move, and so on. But never doubt that you are much in the thoughts of

Your old admirer  
JAMES AGATE

*July 21* There is this to be said for Ravaillac, Charlotte *Friday*, Corday, and Wilkes Booth—at least they were not bunglers. Which is more than can be said for Graf von Stauffenberg, who merely scotch'd the Hitlerian snake instead of killing it. The worst of failure in this kind is that it spoils the market for more competent performers.

*July 22* It is sometimes a mistake to put your eggs into *Saturday*. more than one basket. In *These Were Actors* I wrote very skimpingly of Macready because I had an article on the same actor in hand for Leonard Russell's *Saturday Book*. Eventually this was not used, though it is the better of the two accounts. One of the books I want to write but never shall is a "Life" of Macready bringing together stuff about him that is scattered all over the place. For example, William Archer's story of the clergyman who, pleading the young actor's ease with Lord Byron, then the leading spirit at Drury Lane, added: "Besides all this, my Lord, Mr Macready is a very moral man." And how Byron replied: "Ah, I suppose he wants five pounds a week more for his morality?" With this I should couple the story in the *Reminiscences* which relates how Sheridan Knowles, bearing a first copy of his play *Virginius*, presented himself at a house in Park Lane where

Macready was dining and asked to see him. And how "the great W. C. M.," as Kean always called him, felt "much confusion and embarrassment," and how he rebuked Knowles for disturbing the economy of Sir Robert Kemey's dinner-table. Rudeness was habitual with Maeready. Rehearsing a scene with a brother of George Augustus Sala who called himself Wynn, he would close his eyes tightly when Wynn was on the stage, and before reopening them ask the prompter, "Has it gone?" Then there is Sala's story about how, when *Henry VIII* was in preparation, Macready told Maddox to see that Cardinal Campcius was furnished with a costume which should not seem entirely ridiculous beside the splendid robes he himself was to wear as Wolsey. Maddox, of course, obsequiously disregarded the injunction. At the dress-rehearsal Macready, enthroned in a chair of state, had the various characters paraded before him; he bore all calmly until, clad in scarlet robes bordered by silver tissue-paper and wearing an enormous red hat, Wynn approached. Whereupon the tragedian, clutching both arms of his chair and closing his eyes, gasped out, "Mother Shipton, by God!" Macready had two expressions of disapproval; one was "beast," the other "beast of hell!" Violence of temper can, and very often does, go with geniality of spirit. Macready had no geniality. Even worse, he had no sense of humour. He could record in his Diary that he had boxed the prompter's ears and that night had fallen to his knees to pray that he might be given control over his temper. Next day we find him writing: "Boxed the prompter's ears again." And seeing nothing funny in it. Yes, Macready was as humourless as Mr Dombey himself. But the thing I hold most against the man whom Tennyson called "moral, grave, sublime" is the fact that he was ashamed of his profession and prayed that his children might never follow it. Yes, I think I could do a better sketch of Macready than that contained in *English Diarists of the Nineteenth Century*, a book in the Penguin series which I have just been reading.

*July 28* The week has been extraordinarily busy owing to *Sunday*. Cape asking for a sequel to *Red Letter Nights*. Not, of course, a second gleaning; I wouldn't go over the old ground again, and Cape wouldn't print it if I did. So we

decided upon a complementary volume covering the theatre's lighter side during the last twenty years. This has meant wading through all my old notices of musical comedies, revues, music-halls, and pantomimes—roughly a million words. A hellish job, if I really do wade. Actually I shut my eyes, dab, and if the sentence turns out to be a worth-while one, why then it's a worth-while article. And if not, not. Have taken for title *Immoment Toys*, which is, of course, from *Antony and Cleopatra*, and intend this as a hint to the reader that the fact that one is writing about rubbish is no reason for writing rubbish. Cape and I came to terms on Monday morning, with the result that I worked seventy-two hours on end with only a few hours snatched for sleep. *The book was handed to Cape complete at noon on Thursday.* No reason, of course, for all this haste; I just can't help it. When a job is to be done it must be done as quickly—and as carefully—as my powers permit. And once the job is finished I breathe again and say, "Well, Leo, we've wiped that off!" and set about my ordinary chores. The book is a little shorter than the other two, which is quite as it should be, in view of the material. I have done no re-writing and have had no need to. It seems I must have realised that if you have anything to say about *Hamlet* or *Mourning Becomes Electra* it doesn't matter very much how you say it, since the stuff will "carry" it. Whereas since there is nothing to be said about, say, *Funny Face* or *Lumber Love*, the way you say it becomes of the first importance. Dedication to Jock, as usual.

*July 24* Is the B.B.C. mad? Every week for months it *Monday*. has been allotting twenty-five minutes to a daily item entitled "The Week's Composer." These have included Weber; Fauré; Prokofiev and Shostakovich; Johann Strauss; d'Indy, Chausson, and Dukas; Richard Strauss; Schumann; Bruckner and Mahler; Mozart; Brahms; Albéniz, Granados, and de Falla. And what is wrong with that? Simply that *it happens at 7.30 A.M.!* Now take Sunday. Every Sunday morning there's an item called "Concerto's Progress." This lasts for three-quarters of an hour, and is now in its twenty-second week. What is wrong with that? Simply that *it happens at 8.15 A.M.!* Does the B.B.C. think that music-lovers

are entirely confined to early risers or to people who have been working all night? If it does then it is crazy. Why, when I turn on my wireless at 11 P.M., can I not hear some music of this calibre as an alternative to dance-hall bilge?

I stood to-day for three-quarters of an hour at the junction of Shaftesbury Avenue and New Oxford Street, trying for a taxi. Only one empty cab came along in that time, and this was snapped up by a fool of a woman with a dog. My business was important; hers couldn't be. Why? Because nobody with important business takes a dog with her. Charlie Rogers, up for a long week-end, tells me that he had to stand in the train the whole way from Chester, the compartments being cluttered up with women, all of whom had dogs and/or babies, and some with more dogs than babies. If the train had been leaving London and the women evacuating their dogs and babies, one could understand. The reason for all this rushing about the country in war-time escapes me. "Est-ce que je voyage, moi?" as the French station-master said.

Lunched with my godson, Paul Dehn. He swore to me on his honour (which means that he doesn't expect to be believed) that in the Egyptian Desert (which he has never visited) he saw stuck up in the sand a placard on which some soldier had scrawled: "BEDOUIN & BREAKFAST. Terms Moderate."

*July 25* When I am tired I go through old drawers and cupboards. To-day I found part of an article which I ultimately traced to a piece of bosh called *Infinite Shoeblack* produced some fifteen years ago:

It was indeed Mary who was the Colonel's mistress, though Andrew would not believe it. To put matters to the test he accepted Mary's invitation to dinner. After dinner

Tous deux ils regardaient, de la haute terrasse,  
L'Egypte s'endormir sous un ciel étouffant—

as Hérédia puts it. But alike under the Egyptian canopy, "the air, look you," as under Andrew's Scottish roof Mary still spouted her Carlyle, this time with a pleasing admixture of Swinburne. She proclaimed herself "the infinite shoe-black" but also yearned for

The ache of purple pulses, and the bliss  
Of blinded eyelids that expand again.

Whereupon Andrew said that the ache and the bliss demanded

benefit of clergy. He proposed marriage, even exacted it ; and the price for the indescribable rapture of union with himself, the penniless Gael, was that Mary should renounce all her lovers and the £4000 a year which her aunt, who lived a mile and a half from barracks, had left her. Mary, after toying momentarily with her pearls, leaped at the proposal. Or, to continue :

Tournant sa tête pâle entre les cheveux bruns  
Vers celui qu'enivraient d'invincibles parfums,  
Elle tendit sa bouche et ses prunelles claires.

But Hérédia's Antony, gazing into Cleopatra's eyes, there read vacillation, while Andrew in Mary's pupils read nothing of the sort. Indeed, she did not vacillate, but went back to Andrew's modest Scotch home, had a baby, and died declaring Carlyle was right.

And I reflect how easily I could add a fourth volume to Cape's series. Yet I realise that I must resist. The contents of such a volume could be put forward only as pieces of writing, and nobody is going to stand for that, though I don't see why they shouldn't. After all, the modern painter who presents you with "The Bus-stop, Ponders End" or "The Gas-works, Hackney Wick" doesn't pretend that you are interested in bus-stops and gas-works. He puts his picture forward as a piece of painting. As against this there seems to be a notion that a writer mustn't put anything forward as a piece of writing. Which, if you ask me, is rum.

*July 26*      *Exactness* is a quality lost to the world. Perhaps *Wednesday*. I do not mean more than that very few reviewers possess it. The *New Statesman* article on *Ego 6* by Noel Annan is in many ways superb. It is written with enormous gusto ; there is obviously mind behind it ; and whoever wrote it had read the book. But it is *inexact*.

On such occasions one must be honest : I do not relish the savour of Mr Agate's *Ego*. The fanfares, the blatancies, the moans about income tax, the jibes at anyone who has written a harsh word about him, the raking over the cold ashes of whether Shakespeare or Bacon was the author of those plays—all these I find displeasing. And then there are minor stylistic irritants. He shares, with the author of the *Times* fourth leaders, a penchant for litotes as a figure of speech. Like him, he continually casts his net in the wide

pools of Shakespeare and Dickens, but he quotes, not to illustrate, expand, and embellish his argument, but to score a point, chalk up a mark, and give a knowing nod to the reader, audibly adding, poor fool if he knows not this.

Here the exact and the inexact "kiss and commingle." I am alleged to be in the habit of jibing at anyone who writes a harsh word about me. This is just not true. I do not jibe at Noel Annan for not relishing the savour of the Diaries. Or for disliking "the fanfares, the blatancies, the moans about income tax." I do not mind his objecting to my liking for litotes, merely remarking that what was good enough for the translators of St Paul is good enough for me. He is at liberty to say that I have no ear for poetry, and that my dramatic criticism "lacks deep emotional insight." These are his opinions, and he is entitled to them, and I should not dream of jibing at him for expressing them. Where I become cross is when somebody says I write about people who don't matter, meaning that I write unimportantly about people who do matter. (See *Ego* 5, page 29.) Or that I write "a lot about dull people," meaning that I am dull about exciting people. (See *Ego* 6, page 69.) Noel Annan objects to my "raking over the cold ashes" of the Shakespeare-Bacon controversy, implying that there is no matter for fresh examination. Rubbish! So far as I know, Edward D. Johnson's discovery of the cypher in Don Adriana's letter is entirely new; my note about it was written within a month of Johnson's book. Are we to understand that the controversy is so dead that no new discovery can revive it? Again, rubbish!

Most of all do I resent the statement that I *quote to show off*. Montague has a fine thing on this very point:

In a sense you might say that quoting is a branch of window-dressing, the Baconian art of "seeming wise"—of keeping a great house on quite a small income. But you could only say it in a shallow sense. The will to put all the stock in the window may be found in anyone. But the power to put it there is not to be had without some kind of genuine, if only whimsical, love for the stuff in itself.

C. E. M. was a master of quotation. The example I shall choose is one I have used over and over again in this Diary, but always in little bits, rather in the way Wagner treated the *Preislied*.

The passage occurs in Montague's notice of *Sinbad the Sailor*, a pantomime produced at the Theatre Royal, Manchester, more than thirty years ago. Here it is in its fully grown and superb completeness :

When and where principal girls should be pert and when and where refrain from pertness ; how close they should come to being minxes and yet how they should differentiate themselves from minxes in the eyes of the experts ; to how many affairs of the heart they should make lyric reference while adhering like gum, in their prose passages, to their respective Sinbads, Princes Charming, and Little Boys Blue —all these are deep and hidden things, for ignorance of which, let us trust, we shall not be rebuked, as à Kempis says, at the day of judgment.

Does Noel Annan imagine that Montague makes reference to à Kempis in order to show off his knowledge of the author of the *Imitation*? I say that he is not entitled to attribute my habit of quotation to any motive except that which animated Montaigne, Bacon, Hazlitt, Lamb, Walkley, Montague, Bernard Darwin. In *Ego* 6 I write :

I ought to have foreseen the avalanche of letters that would descend on me as the result of last Sunday's frisk in the Shakespeare-Bacon affair. Fortunately I realise that the writers don't expect an answer, that they are merely cleansing the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff which weighs upon the heart.

Why, instead of saying that the letter-writers want to get something off their chest, do I quote *Macbeth*? Because I find it more amusing. If Noel Annan doesn't realise this it is because, as Dr Johnson said, "his perceptions are disturbed. He is mad." If he does realise it he lies (in the Johnsonian sense), and should change his name to "Noel Annanias."

*July 27*      "Here we have together the accomplished and Thursday. resolute Hadow, and the famous Gilbert Grace.

What may not be anticipated from Batsmen such as these?" Surely there is an echo here? Can it be that of the "redoubtable Dumkins and the unconquerable Podder"? (Or will Noel Annan hold that I am showing off my knowledge of *Pickwick*?) I quote from *The Youth's Play-Hour and*

*Boy's Journal* for 1871, which some unknown friend has sent me. The match was the second (Oval) Gentlemen v. Players of that year. The Gentlemen went in first and scored 299: Hadow 97 and Grace 16. The Players replied with 182 and, following on, ran up a total of 260. This left the Gentlemen with 144 runs to make to win, and one and three-quarter hours in which to get them. I. D. Walker, the side's captain, takes W. G. in with him. He is stumped by Pooley for 22. Now A. N. Hornby, who "contributes nothing." Mr Tylecote is run out for 6, Mr Pauncefote is dismissed for 7, and Mr Green is still in. But the scoring has been rapid, the hundred going up in just over the hour with W. G. out for 48. Let the unknown scribe tell the story :

The game has become one of the utmost excitement ; every moment is precious. Accordingly those who come to the wickets almost run to them. As Mr Pauncefote retires, the younger Grace meets him, Mr Grace running up the ground. There are but fifteen minutes left, and there are twenty runs to get. Mr Grace is soon busy but careful, Mr Green doing the lion's share of the work. But now he is thirsty with his tremendous exertions, the evening is hot and the sun is full on the ground. Mr Green must have some water wherewith to cool his parched throat. So he calls to the Pavilion. The spectators are so intensely eager that they begrudge this very brief interval, but Mr Green is wise in thus refreshing himself, despite their repeated calls of "Play on ! Play on !" Eight minutes more, and nine runs still wanting. And now a single from Grace, and a four from Green, and a grand hit to leg, and now another great hit, and at five minutes to seven the match is won !

I suppose that with the exception of W. G. these names and those of J. C. Shaw, Alfred Shaw, Lillywhite, Carpenter, and Richard Daft mean nothing to the young people of to-day. I can remember the time when they were familiar in our mouths as household words. Or would Noel Annan hold this to be calling the man who doesn't recognise his Crispin Crispian speech a fool ?

*July 28 Friday.* Looking into the new edition of Wilde's plays, I find myself astonished that nobody has written a History of Twaddle. Twaddle did not exist in Restoration comedy. Listen to two ladies in Otway's *The Soldier's Fortune* :



The fat Kapp from "Helen!"

Kapp

George Robey in "Helen!"  
(See p. 188)



*Sid Field*  
(See p. 282)

*Photo Lee Miller, by courtesy of "Vogue"*

SYLVIA. Indeed, such another charming animal as your consort, Sir Davy, might do much with me ; 'tis an unspeakable blessing to lie all night by a horse-load of diseases ; a beastly, unsavoury, old, groaning, grunting, wheezing wretch, that smells of the grave he's going to already. From such a curse, and hair-cloth next my skin, good Heaven deliver me !

LADY DUNCE. Thou mistak'st the use of a husband, Sylvia ; they are not meant for bedfellows ; heretofore, indeed, 'twas a fulsome fashion, to lie o' nights with a husband ; but the world's improved, and customs altered.

The Restoration dramatists kept their twaddle for their tragedies. What I want to know is the date at which the conceits of the Sylvias and the Lady Dunces gave place to the bathos of Wilde's Lady Windermere and Mrs Arbuthnots. The curtain has not risen three minutes on *Lady Windermere's Fan* before Lady W. is saying :

Nowadays people seem to look on life as a speculation. It is not a speculation. It is a sacrament. Its ideal is Love. Its purification is sacrifice.

One wonders how Windermere ever came to marry this walking Manual of Moral Precept. As for Mrs Arbuthnot, it is as though on the top of Marie Corelli somebody had piled Amanda Ros.

Don't come now, and rob me of—of all I have in the whole world. You are so rich in other things. Leave me the little vineyard of my life ; leave me the walled-in garden and the well of water ; the ewe-lamb God sent me, in pity or in wrath, oh, leave me that ! George, don't take Gerald from me.

Such outpourings are not a part of human utterance. They were, however, a part of the stage utterance of the period. Listen to Hugh Murray in Pinero's *The Profligate* :

Renshaw, do you imagine there is no autumn in the life of a profligate ? Do you think there is no moment when the accursed crop begins to rear its millions of heads above ground ? What of the time when those wild oats thrust their ears through the very seams of the floor trodden by the wife whose respect you have learned to covet ! In your house or in the open, the scent of the mildewed grain always in your nostrils, and in your ears no music but the wind's rustle amongst the fat sheaves ! And, worst of all, your wife's heart a granary bursting with the load of shame your profligacy has stored there !

What I want to find out is who was the first playwright to

blow all this rubbish off the English stage ; who was the first to learn from Ibsen how people really talked. How could any dramatist with Ibsen in mind have written such impossible twaddle as that which O. W., in *An Ideal Husband*, gave his peccant politician ? How and why did Wilde write his preposterous trash ? How ? With his tongue in his cheek. Why ? Because the theatre of the day demanded it. The truth as I see it is that Wilde had a Skimpolean non-interest in, and indifference to, the major virtues. I do not believe that he ever had a serious thought or a serious emotion. I find the whole of his work, except when it is being witty, riddled with pretentiousness and *chichi*, and nowhere more so than in *De Profundis*. Hasn't Shaw written somewhere that there is hardly a line in Wilde's book that might not have been written as a literary feat at any time in his career ? As for his interest in social matters—"If the poor had profiles the question of unemployment would be solved " settles that ! Yet for his wit everything must be forgiven him. Wherein lay the secret of this wit that seems, as Lady Stutfield would say, so very, very easy and which so very, very few can bring off ? In, I suggest, Wilde's discovery of the supreme unimportance of being earnest.

*July 29*      Unless my mind has stopped working *The Seventh Saturday. Cross*, which I saw this afternoon at the Empire, is another of those films which, while not actually making a case for Nazi Germany, yet put forth strong claims on behalf of the mild, peace-loving German who is opposed to Hitler and all his works, the Gestapo and all its devilries. The real hero of this film is one Paul Roeder who helps the ostensible hero, George Heisler (Spencer Tracy), to get out of the country, George having previously escaped from a concentration camp. Paul is a loyal soul who is willing to believe anything that he is told. He is earning more money under Hitlerism than he ever earned before. He is not in the least worried that he is making machine-gun parts instead of bicycles. He isn't opposed to Hitler, because he doesn't think about him. George is one of seven who escaped from the camp. He has known so much torture and ill-treatment that he is spiritually a dead man. He does not believe that there is any good left in Germany or his fellow-Germans. But he is wrong, for the rest of the picture is

devoted to showing that Germany, at any rate in 1936, was brimming over with nice, kind creatures willing to risk death and worse to help a fellow-German in distress. There is an underground movement always ready with money and forged passports. It is true that one of the people to whom George applies is a cowardly architect who pretends not to know him. But the architect turns out to have a wife who exudes the milk of human kindness, whereby the architect ultimately gives the underground movement the help it needs. Paul, it goes without saying, is quite willing to risk the worst the Gestapo can do to himself, his wife and three children, all on behalf of dear George. They find George a bedroom at an inn where the chambermaid recognises George from a police advertisement offering a reward of 5000 marks. Does Gretchen telephone the Gestapo? No. It seems that all the inns in Germany have chambermaids who loathe the Gestapo. Toni, for that turns out to be Gretchen's name, is discovered to be the nicest German of the lot. She relinquishes the reward, hides George in her bedroom, and helps him to escape. And so George makes his ship. He has learned that Germany is overflowing with kindly Aryans. He is convinced that there is a "core of God-given decency" in every race and every people, and by implication, in Nazi Germany. The moral? That after the war we must take care what we do to the few nasty Germans for fear of hurting the mass of nice ones.

*July 30* Browsed in George Augustus Sala's *Paris Herself Sunday. Again.* This has a full account of the famous Café Anglais, renowned in Balzac's day. I remember it perfectly. I was paying my first visit to Paris in company with Heinrich Robinow, a Hamburg Jew of good family—his uncle had been Bismarck's doctor—who was apprenticed to the Manchester shipping trade. We dined at the Café and were immensely impressed by its sombre grandeur. But that was all there was to impress us since, with the exception of two aggressively English maiden ladies insisting on tea and toast, there were no other diners. We were the last to leave, the chasseur had departed, and I remember being struck by the melancholy with which the old waiter closed the doors behind us. Next day we learned that they were being closed for the last time and on the last customers.

*July 31* To-day I receive a registered parcel containing :  
*Monday.*

1. This cutting from a North London paper :

### MARRIAGE

On Wednesday, July 26, 1944, at the Reformed Synagogue, Brondesbury Park, by Rabbi Cheitz Feitelbaum, ERASMUS GLOHWURM, former Opera-singer to the Court of Vienna, to ERNA KATZENGEBISS, Playwright.

2. A small cardboard box containing a piece of wedding-cake.
3. An advance copy of *The London Night Light*, No. 5, August 1, 1944 :

### EVENT OF THE WEEK !!!

On last Wednesday Juli 26 takes place the long-expekted and much-wished-for by their many Friends, Marriage of the Aktor and past Opernsänger Erasmus Glohwurm to our talented Dramatikerin, Aktress, and charming Kollege, Erna Katzengebiss. The Marriage-Zeremonie is kondukted at Brondesbury-Synagog in presenz of many Relatis and Friends by the Rcv. Cheitz Feitelbaum, part of the Service in englisch, part by Dr Feitelbaum, who knows only hebraic, in the Hebrew langage. Under the many Gests attending we see the Comtesse Irmalina Klotzreimer, the Baron Kretz von Schwerdenau, General von Schmetterling (in Offiziersuniform with many Orders), Fr. Fanni von Steiss, Direktor Schweinvogel, Fr. Greta Goldheimer, Frau Hilde Kruschen, Dr Israel Bauchpresser and many others of the Sozial, Art-and-Theater-world. After, many invited Gests to the festiv-dekoration Haus of Fr. Kruschen in Woglinda Road, where with much Taste is prepared by Samuel Stern himself from his famous Delikatessen-stor in Gurnemanz-Grove a Wedding-Meal. Not have I space to deskribe the Haringsalat, the Brown-stew, the smokd Tunges and noble Wurscht of twenty kinds. Only in the midst of the Feast does a little Malheur happen. Rabbi Feitelbaum, invited of course, stands up to make in Hebrew a long Talk of Kongratulation. In a Pause to refresh him with some smokd Haring do unfortunately several Haring-bones stick themselves in the Rabbi's Throat. But to our Joy is also present Dr Florestan Motzafisch, well-known Phisician out of Linz, who quickly with profezionell Zeal plunges both Hands in the throat of the Rabbi and extrakts dozens of Bones therefrom. At this the Kompagnie applauds long and loud, and the Rabbi is able to continue his speech for the next Hour. Now having eat and drinked to the Fill

are the tables clered, and the Entertainment begins with Dr Hugo Hundegebell at the Piano, who plays first, of Beethoven Waldsteinsonate, then Pathétiquesonate, then Hammerklaviersonate. Now declares the Kompagnie for more, Dr Hundegebell plays his own Transkription of Schubert-Sinfonie in H minor. Then all dance a little, and to finish of Strauss a Galopp. But now the wedding pair kommands : "Silentium!" In the Kostum of Brünnhilde sings Greta Goldheimer some Arias of Lortzing, Marschner and Goetz, then by Peter Cornelius "Brautlieder," then with the Bridegroom the full (without Cuts) Tristan-Isolde-Duett out of Akt 2, with four-handed play of Hundegebell and Simon Salamon. Then commences by the Bride reading of her new Komodie, *Helter-Shelter*, at which All laugh much. Then again a few Walzer, then some Sandwitches and Wein, then is read by Isolde Gänsebrust her new Tragodie *In Ober-hollabrunn*. On this, Reading by Heinz Butterbrod of his new Book of Novels *Tritsch-Traitsch*, some lively, some Pathos-full. Now is it Evening and begins the Fun. First plays Fri. Linda Brielebitz twelve Sonaten for Violine without Akkompaniment, by Corelli. Then recites Glohwurm Akts 3, 4 and 5 of *Don Carlos*. Then in light Mood produces himself our Rabbi Feitelbaum in Hebrew Danzes. Then some Korusses. Again we take Refreshment, on which gives us Greta Goldheimer of Schumann the "Dichterliebe." After, a new play by a young Poet amongst us, Hunz Kunz, he was in Arabien a Guide, and after the play reads to us Extraks from the Philosophien of Sadi-ben-Abi-ben-Dabi. Then again some Danzing. Such entertainment has for several Hours kontinued, at Midnight outside the Bedroom of the Married-ones a Serenade with words by Isidor Lampenschütz and Musik very old of the time of the Love-singers in fourteenth-Year-hundred. Now sings again Greta Goldheimer outside the door several Arias, and all join in Khorus from *Freischütz* "Wir winden Dir den Jungfernkranz." Last, recites the Bridegroom from the Balkon Szenes out of *Egmont* and *Torquato Tasso*. To the married Pair we say then "Good Wishes," and all singing into the Night depart.

*Aug. 1 Letter to Brother Harry :*

*Tuesday.*

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*

*Aug. 1. 44*

**DEAR DADDY,**

The doodle-bug may be knocking at the door, or window,

or, more likely, roof. But we have, thank God, something else in hand ; so let him knock. Here is a list of the "something else" on which I am engaged at the moment :

- (1) Revising *Brief Chronicles* in view of a second edition.
- (2) Making a fresh index for same.
- (3) Revising *Red Letter Nights* with similar object.
- (4) Correcting index of same.
- (5) Reading proofs of new editions of *Blessed Are the Rich* and
- (6) *Gemel in London*. (You should try correcting two novels simultaneously !)
- (7) Revising proofs of second impression of *Ego 6*.
- (8) Preparing *A Shorter Ego* on the lines of John Bailey's *A Shorter Boswell*.
- (9) Revising proofs of Neville Cardus's *Ten Composers*, sent me by Cape, N. C. being in Australia !!
- (10) Writing *Ego 7*.

You realise that, like Elliston with the fish, I now count my work for the *Sunday Times*, the *Daily Express*, and the *Tatler* as nothing.

What does a little surprise me is that after spending eighteen out of the twenty-four hours at my desk it has become a little difficult for me to walk. I consulted a chemist about this, and he told me that I am suffering from what is known as "Athlete's Foot" !!!! The cure, it appears, is to continue sitting at my desk with each foot immersed in a bucket of boiling water liberally sprinkled with Scrubb's ammonia. Charming ! What about a picture of this for *Ego 7* ? With the caption : "A critic in hot water."

Would you like a note or two on shelter manners ? I have discovered that American soldiers continually chew gum even while they're asleep. And here is a picture of a young man from Arizona or somewhere going to bed. He came into the shelter about four o'clock this morning, took off his cap, tunic, shirt, trousers, boots, socks, so that he was stark naked. He then resumed his boots, put on his cap, and, piling the rest of his kit on his chest, lay down on the bunk and went to sleep !

I hear that a doodle-bug flew so low over Regent's Park the other night that the members of the company playing *The Winter's Tale* prostrated themselves on the sward. "For a moment," said a wag who was present, "I thought I was watching *The Mikado*."

No more for the time being. I must now trudge out to Hammersmith to see *Macbeth* performed against green

curtains. This ought to mean that I shall hobble to Tottenham Court Road Tube, change at Leicester Square, sprain at least one ankle climbing some hundreds of stairs, get out at Hammersmith, limp to the theatre, reversing the process on the return journey and spraining the other ankle on the escalator. But shall I do this? I shall not. I shall, in the absence of taxis, hire a car; which will cost dear Stanley Rubinstein the paltry sum of five pounds.

I have changed my mind. I shall go instead to see Ralph Lynn, at the Duke of York's. This will probably be funnier, and certainly cheaper.

Ever,  
JIMMIE

Aug. 2      Trouvailles.  
Wednesday.

Enjoying my after-dinner Havana in the hotel lounge two old friends I hadn't seen for some time drifted in.

SIR JOHN HAMMERTON, *Other Things than War*

Aug. 3      Not too pleased with my behaviour on Tuesday,  
Thursday. to-night I trekked out to Asia Minor—*i.e.*, Hammersmith—having found somebody to do the double journey for £2. After all, an actor of quality is an actor of quality, and Ernest Milton is *that*, in spite of his irritating voice and mannerisms. Macbeth is the nearest to the sheer unactable of Shakespeare's big parts; in comparison Lear is child's play. All the actor has to do with that old man is to make him look like something by Blake and talk like somebody out of the Book of Isaiah, if not the prophet himself, and the tragedian who cannot do both of these is, God bless us, a thing of naught. But Macbeth is a soldier and a poet, and to make things even more difficult he is a villain with the nicest possible sense of his villainy. The Thane of Cawdor is not a killer for the fun of it, like Richard the Third; he does not, as the second Richard would have done, commit murder in order to see what it feels like to be a murderer; there is none of that modern hanky-panky which pretends that every murderer holds himself to be different from other murderers. Macbeth knows exactly what he is doing, *has no taste for it*, but knows that he must go on. How shall an actor play this monster? With a swashing and a martial outside, and a hint of that valour and uprightness

which have won him "golden opinions"? But Nature has denied Ernest Milton physical magnificence as forthrightly as she denied William Terriss—the sculptor's *beau idéal* of a general, and one who could have bestridden a horse in any *Siegesallee* in any of the world's capitals—the wit to string three words of Shakespeare together and convey what they meant. It was obvious from the start that E. M. intended to go all out for the poet and let the soldier take care of himself. The result was the best speaking of this play's verse that I have ever heard. Ernest had obviously been at immense pains with his voice; that note of wailing and moaning which has been the envy of sirens was entirely absent. There was a great display of noise at the end, and if some of it was hysterical, one had just to reflect that no player can have everything. Irving was vocally inadequate in this last act, but then, as Ellen Terry wrote, he made up for it by looking like "a great famished wolf." Ernest's physical means do not permit the full hurly-burly, and it is here that I expect to see—or rather to hear—Wolfit, who can never be a gaunt and famished Wolfit, make stupendous amends. (D. W. has a working sense of poetry, but no more.) What I shall remember about Ernest's performance to-night is his playing of the banquet scene, his touches of Irvingesque humour, and the hushed, almost hypnotic delivery of the "Tarquin's ravishing stride" speech. La Sonnambula will never be one of Vivienne Bennett's best rôles. It is the old question of the *optique du théâtre* all over again. I just don't believe in tip-toeing little ladies demanding to be filled from crown to toe top-full of direst cruelty. Shakespeare meant this character to be harder than nails, and la Bennett is about as hard as clinging ivy. "Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under't," says Lady M. Whercat I half expected to hear her lord reply, "Mignonne, allons voir si la rose . . ."!

*Aug. 4 Friday.* The lamented death of "Michael Orme," the widow of J. T. Grein, has turned my thoughts towards one of the theatre's most remarkable figures. This little Dutchman was indeed an extraordinary personality; he was so tiny that one had the impression that when he sat in his stall his feet did not touch the floor. He was always bubbling over with something or other, generally indignation at some

misunderstanding of, or imagined affront put upon, his beloved theatre. Vaguely one heard that he had some connection with the tea business, but I always thought the connection was not much closer than that of Mr Micawber with the coal and banking industries. It seemed impossible for Jack to have any existence outside the world of the playhouse. He was your true man of the theatre, and especially of the cosmopolitan and educated theatre ; and perhaps this was why the little confidences with which he honoured one between the acts were invariably in French. "Ce n'est pas ça, cher collègue, ce n'est pas ça !" he would say ; and that clinched the matter. He could listen with equal facility to plays in the English, French, German, Dutch, and Italian tongues, and did some thirty-five years of listening before, in 1897, he was appointed dramatic critic to the *Sunday Times*, which post he held for twenty-one years.

*Aug. 5*      Those two harridans, *Time and Tide*, have been at *Saturday*. it again ; what *Time* gives *Tide* sweeps away. *Time* has more than a column in praise of *Red Letter Nights* ; which would be all right were it not for *Tide* summing up : "If Mr Agate's work has finally a deadening effect, it is because it rests upon an absolute profanity of values." I am rather surprised that *Time* didn't say to *Tide*, "My dear girl, of course if you want to say that I suppose you must—but why not use the right word ? You surely mean 'profanation' ? "

*Aug. 7*      After working at my desk all day I turned on the *Monday*. wireless to-night prepared to relax with a cigar and a glass of whiskey. At eleven o'clock I must listen to the news in Gaelic. At 11.5 I must listen to a Gaelic programme which lasts for twenty-five minutes ! At 11.30 I am battered by a dance band, and for the seventh time in eight nights—because I have counted—I hear somebody singing :

"I couldn't sleep a wink last night,  
Because we had that silly fight ;  
I thought my heart would break the whole night through,  
I knew that you'd be sorry and I'm sorry too.  
I didn't have my favourite dream,  
The one in which I hold you tight.  
I had to call you up this morning  
To see if everything was still all right.  
Yes, I had to call you up this morning  
Because I couldn't sleep a wink last night."

Abel Hermant was accustomed to head his novels " Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la Société." I think it should be put on record that in August 1944, at a time when the British and American troops were breaking through the German lines, this is the kind of thing that was inflicted on us. I agree that there are nitwits who like this stuff and that it is the duty—in fact, the special function—of the B.B.C. to provide it. But why presume that every one listening after 11 o'clock is a nitwit? I refuse to believe that the ether has no room for an alternative programme in the hour before midnight.

*Aug. 8* Not everybody agrees with me in my admiration of *Tuesday*. Ernest Milton's Macbeth. A total stranger writes from an address in Surrey :

The clutch accompanying " Is this a dagger . . ." would, had I not known better, have led me to believe the Thane of Cawdor was swiping a roving mosquito. " Get thee back, my soul is too much charged With blood of thine already " was intoned in the half-candid manner of some one saying, " No, old man, I can't possibly take any more of your clothing coupons." And the eye-opening and eyebrow-wagging that accompanied all this still makes me feel rather nervous. Miss Bennett, I thought, formed a splendid pocket of resistance against such a wadget of mannerisms, and I can but admire her till I die. Tell me that I am suffering from thick-coming fancies, that my imagination is cabin'd, cribb'd, confined—I'll none of it. Macbeth, to me, is a combination of Hamlet and the second Richard, with rather more than a dash of valour for full measure : I felt that I had been watching a combination of Donald Wolfit's Richard III and almost anybody's Shylock.

*Aug. 11* Wrote to George Lyttelton, quoting a nice thing out *Friday*. of D. B. Wyndham Lewis's article in this week's

*Tatler* : " We greatly esteem the modern school-master type, which is very often such a cultivated, easy, genial man of the world that we'd entrust anything to it, except maybe a child's future."

*Aug. 12* *Keep Going*, last night's revue at the Palace, *Saturday*. turned out to be a bright, quick-moving, reasonably entertaining show. If " bored " isn't quite the rhyme Tennyson would have chosen for " Maud," the music

was remarkably tuneful. The Tudor pastiche, accompanying words said to have been written by Anne Boleyn while awaiting execution, was extremely clever; my own view is that it was specially composed by the bluff King himself! There was a delicious skit in which everything appertaining to opera was included except the music: thus proving, if proof were needed, that but for the tunes, opera—and you can include music-drama as well—shows the human mind at the most lambent of its idiocy. Corybantomanes had plenty to ravish them. Comely young ladies tied themselves enthusiastically into knots; young gentlemen in mustard-coloured suits the sleeves of which came down below their thumbs, hurled themselves energetically about.

*Aug. 18 Letter to Neville Cardus:  
Sunday.*

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*

*Aug. 13, 44*

DEAR CARDUS,

Cape asked me to find somebody to correct the proofs of your book, and I found Leo Pavia (paid) and self (unpaid).

I send you a corrected proof, as I think it would interest you to see the umpires' decisions. But for them you would have been, to use your own words, "bowled all over your bloody wicket" a score of times. Except, of course, in the places where you played on.

Both of us think that *Ten Composers* is a sound and satisfying, as well as a brilliant book, with astonishingly few *gaffes*. I must, of course, as a dramatic critic, quarrel with your notion that Wagner without his music is as good a dramatist as Shakespeare shorn of his poetry. Are you really going to compare that old josser Wotan, chunnering away in a nightgown, with earth-shaking Lear? Go to! I won't even have it that he is up to Prospero's weight. Are you going to tell me that Hans Sachs is half the size of Falstaff? Or that Telramund and Ortrud are the equivalent of Macbeth and his lady? Be good enough to point out to me anything in Wagner as dramatically exciting as the play scene in *Hamlet*, the murder and banquet scenes in *Macbeth*, or Iago's solicitation of Othello. No, my dear fellow, strip Wagner of his music and you get a twaddlesome, pretentious bore that nobody believes in any longer except the entire German nation and Ernest Newman. Take away the poetry from Shakespeare and you get the average London performance of a Shakespeare play, the only alternative being, as some of

our more delicate fellows do, to give the poetry and let the drama go hang.

In the meantime, what about returning to this country, where the musical critics are all hitting their wickets, when they are not obstructing the field ? Or have you got a kangaroo fixation ?

Yours ever,  
JAMES AGATE

*Aug. 14* In *Middle East Diary* Noel Coward calls those of *Monday*. his Forces audiences who didn't like him " bloody-minded." " I can only assume that black inward rage has astonishing curative powers, for by the time I had got through my first three numbers all fatigue and fever had fled from me." I have no knowledge of what Noel's numbers may have been, but I can very well realise that sophisticated chit-chat about the West End may not mean very much to troops who have spent three years in the Libyan Desert. It's all a matter of approach. I began my talk to-day to the sailors at the Southern Hospital, Dartford, many of whom were on crutches and some in wheel-chairs : " Lead-swingers and malingeringers ! " Which at once made me all right with them. The talk was an unrehearsed affair, consisting of stories and simple stuff about the theatre ; I am convinced that the last thing recuperating sailors want to listen to is highbrow stuff about the art of drama. Went round some of the wards, and came away extraordinarily refreshed in mind.

*Aug. 15* The news of the second invasion of France broke *Tuesday*. to-day. Between Nice and Marseilles, the object being to join up with the Allied armies advancing from Normandy. This must mean either the Aix—Avignon route or the more southerly Salon—Arles—Nîmes way. Or both. Whichever road they take, I could wish I were with them. I know every blade of grass thereabouts. Or did in the last war, when I spent three years dispatching those blades, after they had become hay, to Salonika.

*Aug. 16* Dean Inge writes :  
*Wednesday.*

In supporting this war the owners of property knew that they were signing their own death-warrant. They have

accepted the destruction of their standard of living without squealing ; I do not think that their patriotism has been sufficiently recognised.

And I say : Not so fast, Mr Dean. Property-owners, whether squealing or not, are not entitled to accept on my behalf the destruction of my standard of *thinking*. I don't believe that you can have great art under a democracy. I believe that great art is individualistic, and that any state of society that tends to lessen the importance of the individual tends to do away with the great artist. (This country knows nothing whatever about democracy ; it merely talks about it.) America, where every man is held to be as good as the next, has produced very few artists of the first rank. (See Whitman on the subject.) Soviet Russia hasn't produced a composer fit to lick—and I don't mean latch—the boots of the Czarist lot. I prefer Tchehov's plays to dramas about communal wash-houses. I prefer any film made out of *War and Peace* to this afternoon's Soviet nonsense entitled *Little Cart-horse* or some such name, the heroine of which was a milk-separator ! I haven't the least objection to the wealthy giving away their country houses, grouse-moors, yachts, and so on. What I object to is their giving away the great art which these things entail even though they may not create it.

Lunched with Norman Newman, who told me this amusing story. It seems that one of our Cabinet Ministers, going to inspect the doodle-bug damage in North London, was ass enough to tell the people that it was no use making a fuss as there was worse to come. Whereupon a burly individual launched a kick at the Cabinet Minister, who skilfully evaded it, with the result that a hob-nailed boot was firmly embedded in the posterior of the Borough Mayoress ! Norman added that everybody in the Borough, including the Mayor, is still laughing.

Aug. 17      Letter from Kent :  
Thursday.

Prying into an *Ego* (3 or 4) which I discovered in a second-hand-book profiteer's shop in the West Country recently, I read that you had Harrison Ainsworth's walking-stick. Yesterday, while turning over some of my grandfather's old clutter, I found Ainsworth's visiting-card, which I enclose. So now all you need is the hat and the gloves.

*Aug. 18* They've been at it again. Meaning the intellectuals.  
*Friday.* The Welsh intellectuals this time. Here is a compilation called *Wales*, edited by Keidrych Rhys. Herein Mr Mervyn Levy asks me to recognise the Vale of Clwyd in

Hare lip in the village street,  
 Handbell's mot in eventime,  
 Feel the vale and mountain meet,  
 With incomparable mime.

And Cardiff in

Tallowland lights the glittering window panes  
 In Butetown, scamen babbling in the rains  
 Shudder gleetcold in the embrace of whores,  
 Scarlet heels anchored in the tinking doors.  
 Swift bubbling fish, brine silvery horn shells bone  
 Chanty green facets in the hearts of stone.

Hear, too, Mr Emyr Humphreys in *A Democratic Vista*:

We are the people, for whom politicians shout and soldiers fight,  
 We sow and reap, eat and sleep, copulate in secret, think  
 In circumferences of one dimension.  
 We are the sacred people, the secular mystery, the Host,  
 Whitman's elastic deity, Marx's material, Rousseau's noble savage,  
 Mayakovsky's beloved—  
 Tom, Guto, Dic, Wil, Dafie, and Mc—  
 Reasonably efficient between dawn and sunset,  
 God chewing tobacco, God drinking tea, digesting rice,  
 We are the people. God is not mocked.

And Mr Ken Etheridge writing on behalf of his brother airmen:

We live on lechery, console with lust  
 The saucy panic of our aching dust ;  
 Enjoy for wine and women something near  
 With tarts in corner-houses and small beer ;  
 Learn airmanlike behaviour from King's Regs.  
 (Above the shoulders and below the legs) ;  
 Improve the body and forget the mind,  
 Although we may, not altogether blind,  
 Discuss politely, as we bank the fires,  
 Best prophylactics for obscene desires ;  
 And all our lisping numbers are the means  
 Of aphrodisiac verses in latrines.

Of course, this piffle isn't Wales at all: it is just dear silly Bloomsbury all over again.

Something over a year ago I went down to Harwich to adjudicate in a poetry competition which I had organised, and to give the prizes. There were scores of entries. It takes a lot of courage to read poetry to a hall full of sailors, but

I had promised to read the winning poem, and I did. Here it is :

### GULLS

Round about us the gulls are flying  
Leisurely graceful, easily strong ;  
In the seas of the world men (so many) are dying,  
But the gulls are still crying, always crying,  
Caring so little, trailing along.

We laugh when, greedy, indifference denying,  
They dive, our scavengers, down to the meal.  
But round and about us they still are flying  
When we have forgotten : and always their crying  
Feels for us nothing : but—seems to feel.

They are with us when dusk comes over us, sighing,  
With us, too, when the sun is high :  
Caring not whether we sink or, defying,  
Conquer : unmindfully flying, just flying,  
But with all the grief of the world in their cry.

This is not a good poem, and the sixth line is dreadful. But it has something which makes it better than the nonsense about gleetcold shudders.

*Aug. 19 Saturday*      The Allied advance into Provence sets me thinking of old days. In particular of Christmas Day, 1916. Hay was quiet for the moment. So we—meaning

Major A. W. Devas Jones, two junior officers, and myself—took the old Studebaker from Arles to Vaucluse, where we decided to lunch at the hotel named after Petrarch and his Laura. There we learned that Laura was a stout, plain-featured, respectable married woman, the mother of some seven children and possessing a healthy contempt for her whining sonneteer. I remember that the day was so hot that we not only ate our Christmas dinner out of doors—we had trout caught that morning in the stream—but took off our tunics and sat in the sun. The reader must be told that the little hotel was perched on a tiny hill, while on the other side of a minuscule valley, about a mashie-shot away, was another tiny hill, crowned by a small farmhouse. In the middle of our meal we saw a *poilu* struggling up the steep slope, laden with everything a *poilu* carries. Arrived at his doorway, he waved to us, and presently reappeared at the bedroom window with his buxom wife, and cried out, “Bon appétit, messieurs !” “The same to you !” we chorused, each in his best French. But the *poilu* did not hear. He had already tumbled his wife on to the bed, refraining with extra-

ordinary tact from pulling down the blind. We, with equal tact, and making no alteration in the disposition of our chairs, drank a toast to the *poilu*, to Madame, and to France.

*Aug. 20* The *Express* has given me five hundred words in *Sunday*, which to tell its readers what I think about Henry Wood, who died yesterday. Well, I think simply that Wood was a great man. I can remember greater conductors. But I know of none who had a greater love of music for its own sake, and not as the means through which his own virtuosity could be recognised. Just as many years earlier Hallé had determined to make Manchester musical, so Wood determined to make music a part of the intellectual life of London. There can be no doubt that he succeeded; to-day London without the Proms would not be London. He was a great innovator, and to him, chiefly, the public was indebted for its first acquaintance with the works of Tschaikowsky, Strauss, Sibelius, and Vaughan Williams. Whatever shortcomings may be alleged, even if his powers were a part of talent rather than genius, it must always be remembered that while his predecessors were all of foreign extraction—Jullien was French, Costa and Mancinelli were Italian, Manns, Hallé, and Richter German—Henry Wood was the first great English conductor. And it is no small part of his fame that he did more than any other man to improve the status of the orchestral player in this country. Here is what I am saying in the *Express* to-morrow:

When Henry Wood first raised his baton he found this country a highly unmusical nation. There was a lot of Italian squalling in the neighbourhood of Covent Garden during the months of May and June, and a lot of pretence by the tiaras and starched shirts that they understood what it was about. But the general notion of music was the Overture to *William Tell*, followed by Somebody's Lancers or Quadrilles. Except, of course, once a year when everybody traipsed out to the Crystal Palace to hear five thousand sopranos and contraltos, tenors and basses, bleat that they, like sheep, had gone astray.

Wood did for this country's potential music-lovers what Lilian Baylis did for its potential drama-lovers. He popularised music, but not in the sense in which that word is generally used. A "popular" edition of the works of some great dramatist or novelist generally means cheap paper, ramshackle binding, execrable print, abominable illustrations.



*France, 1916*

(See p. 172)



*England, 1944*

*Photo Angus McBean*

Wood's notion of popularising music was to give the best performances of the best stuff in the best way at prices within the reach of the man in the street. Talking of streets, did anybody ever go on foot to Covent Garden ? No. Did broughams drawn by spanking bays, or, in later years, the more expensive miracles of the motor-engineer, collide in Langham Place ? No. Henry Wood conceived his job not as bringing music to the best people, but as bringing the best music to the people.

How good a conductor was he ? Shall we say that he was an all-rounder ? Yes. And a great all-rounder ? Yes. Was Henry a great man ? Yes. Hazlitt has laid it down—in an essay on the Indian Jugglers, if you please—that there are four tests for greatness. Has a man great power ? Has that power produced great effects ? Has a man shown greatness in a way that cannot be hid or gainsaid ? Has he filled up a certain idea in the public mind ? Wood came through all four tests with flying colours. To the average man he became identified with—nay, he *was*—London's music. The average man trusted Henry. He knew that if Henry thought a work worth performing it was worth his, the average man's, listening. He preserved the best in the old music and was a courageous innovator. And behind it all he gave you the conviction that he knew his job. Even more important, he impressed you as putting the composer first, the orchestral and solo players second, and himself last.

Wood was not a man of excessive culture, though he could hold his own in a profession where virtuosity is often a polite name for half-wittedness. His voice was high and squeaky. His English was not impeccable, and nobody wanted it to be. His remark to the fiddlers, “Wot d'you think you're a-doing of, sawring away regardless ?” has become legend. They called him “Timber,” and rightly. The timber was of oak. He died in the fulness of time and achievement. His work was done. He knew himself beloved. He is a part of musical England for ever.

*Aug. 23*      The liberation of Paris was announced in the one *Wednesday*. o'clock News. In the words of the announcer :  
“ Fifty thousand of the armed forces of the interior and several hundred thousands of unarmed patriots. . . . ” Not unarmed, I think, but armed haphazardly !

There is a transcendentality of delirium—the reader must know the phrase by now—about B.B.C. matters which baffles

me completely. I have known them fade out in the middle of the Hallelujah Chorus, the last page of *Tristan*, and the last ten bars of the Hammerklavier Sonata. And always in favour of popular muck. What I have never known them do is to fade out muck in any circumstances whatever. To-night I listened in to a special programme in honour of France. Incidentally, there was a long speech supposed to convey the views of the Man in the Street. This was uttered in an announcer's voice and contained the words "garish" and "pristine." But let that pass. The point is that to-night, of all nights, the B.B.C. chose to fade out in the middle of the *Marseillaise*! After which a female voice said, "You are now going to listen to *Cap and Bells*, a late-night revue with . . . etc., etc." Gibbering like Othello, I rang up the B.B.C., and, getting hold of the Biggest Noise in Charge, said: "This is James Agate speaking. Do you know that you have faded out in the middle of the *Marseillaise*? Goats and monkeys! May the Corporation rot, perish, and be damned!" And rang off. Either the principle of elasticity is admitted by the B.B.C., or it isn't. If it isn't, then it is surely a matter of timing and rehearsal. Why didn't they time and rehearse properly? If there are Other Factors I Know Nothing About, then the B.B.C. must appoint a Director of Unknown Factors whose job it is to foresee and prevent *gaffes* like to-night's. Salary £5000 a year. Any *gaffe* to entail instant dismissal. Otherwise I expect to hear any evening now: "At 11 A.M. to-day the General in Command of the Axis Forces on the Rhine asked for an armistice, which the Allies granted on the following terms . . ." (*Female voice interrupts.*) "Listeners will now hear *Pop Goes the Weasel*, a late-night revue featuring Miss Naomi Thickhedde and the Uvula Boys. . . ."

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*Aug. 24*      In a letter from a major serving abroad:  
*Thursday.*

How right you are about the impossibility of educating the lower classes. The lower class educated is the lower class spoilt. Let them remain what they should be—rough and tough, raw and dumb. Give them more football grounds, boxing-rings, and dog-tracks; more Metropolitans and Bedfords; more Florrie Fordes and Bud Flanagans; more gin palaces and fish and chips and winkles; let them have

great roaring whores with feather boas. Man should be a lusty beast, not a niminy-piminy. I have more than three hundred men under me. They come from North and South, East and West, labourers, farmers, drivers, butchers, factory hands, and bricklayers. They drink, they swear, they whore—if they get a chance. But there's the devil's glory in them. Day and night, in North Africa and Italy, they have driven heavy lorries over mountain roads in snow or rain, across the plains in the heat and the dust. They are always undefeated, undefeatable. What do they want to go back to after the war? A new world? Not if they can help it. To the old world, glorified and magnified. Stronger and cheaper pints of beer, bigger wins on Saturday afternoons, better clothes, the same food but cheaper and more plentiful, the same houses but lighter and healthier. They want to work hard and play hard—but at their own sort of work and their own sort of play. They are men—there are no men like them. I hear and know little of the plans devised by our Elder Statesmen for an England after the war. But I fear we are condemning a race of demi-gods to a perpetual Surbiton.

"Great roaring whores with feather boas" is superb. And I hope original. This letter stands for something that most high-brows and certainly the *New Statesman* gang refuse to understand. The one constant thing in my political economy is my belief in the non-educability of the non-educated. I agree with the gallant major that to educate the working classes is not only infeasible but undesirable. I am, and always have been, entirely consistent about this. I find in *Ego 8*, in an entry made almost exactly eight years ago to the day, the following:

Coming back in the car, George and I talked about the Blackpuddians, and agreed that the outstanding feature of the working classes is their self-containment. They don't want the things the rich want—travel, clothes, jewels, expensive food and wines, grand opera, and hand-painted pictures. They prefer Blackpool to Biarritz, cloth caps to Ascot toppers, beer to champagne. Their notion of music and pictures is Gracie Fields, and their idea of a racehorse is something not to own, but to bet on.

I will only add to this that it is no use trying to foist on the lower classes better minds or better manners, for the simple reason that they don't want better minds or better manners. Intellectuals have never understood this, and never will. The education of the masses is all my eye and Kingsley Martin!

Aug. 25 Went last night to Hammersmith to see Donald Friday. Wolfit's *Macbeth*. The critics were not invited officially as the production does not come to London until the spring, the present performance being regarded as in the nature of a try-out. My impression is that time will not make much difference to this actor's Macbeth, and that in its essentials it is as good now as it can ever be. It is a forceful, downright rather than subtle performance, with a great deal of intelligent verse-speaking rather than poetry, and not a shred of pathos. It is hard to have to say this, because D. W. obviously knows when pathos is indicated ; indeed, his efforts to achieve it are heart-rending !

Wolfit last night made his first entrance like a housebreaker. Now this is wrong, and unimaginatively wrong. When Duncan says

There's no art  
To find the mind's construction in the face :  
He was a gentleman on whom I built  
An absolute trust

we are not to suppose that Shakespeare is in the least concerned to let us know what Cawdor looked like. *The lines are to serve as pointer to Macbeth, who immediately enters.* From which it follows that Macbeth must look absolutely trustworthy. Whereas if I had been Duncan I wouldn't have trusted this obvious burglar with as much as a tea-spoon. Nevertheless, in spite of shortcomings inherent in this actor's physical make-up, his performance is a fine thing, and sets the seal on a fine actor. Dorothy Black's Lady Macbeth is an extremely intelligent rendering and a successful one, given that this actress is not a contralto but a mezzo-soprano. It is no good piping

O never  
Shall sun that morrow see !

This has got to be spoken from the cellar or not at all. Most of the supporting cast was lamentable. Macduff made too much noise. Banquo had lost his voice, and when he appeared as the Ghost reminded me of some old actor who had played Fleance in Irving's revival in 1875. Fleance was a strapping young woman with enormous calves. And there were a lot of dreadful, if well-intentioned, young men who kept bobbing up

and down in one subsidiary character after another and giving the worst performances I have seen of all of them.

Aug. 26      Part of a letter from Los Angeles :  
Saturday.

Those who saw Irving at his best know that to-day none stands in such lonely splendour. Greatest when he had assistance from the greatest; recall *Macbeth*, Act i, scene 5. Ellen Terry seated in huge high-backed chair by fire in massive hearth, loose-robed in peacock blue, shimmering silver ornaments in fair hair—every inch a queen of the stage—reading a letter, each syllable dropping clear as water from an icicle. Fiercely she seizes Opportunity, no milk of human kindness in her, clutches at her breasts under the blue robe, furiously appeals to hell for aid, grasps at the murdering dagger, cries “Hold, hold.” . . . Suddenly enter from behind the arras . . . Macbeth, “Great Glamis!” Has he heard her? No, no. Recall how Irving paused to stare in wonder, as she, exulting, embraces him and murmurs, “Great Glamis! worthy Cawdor!” (What an entrance, nothing in all the entrances in all the plays excels it.) Then in four lines she tells him her intent. . . . They were always very careful about entrances. Recall Act i, scene 7, Irving ending his soliloquy, almost in tears, voice trembling, sorry for himself. . . . Terry rushes in from doorway lower R. . . . He turns on her terrified. “How now,” a scream of dismay, has some one overheard? No. It’s only you. “What news?” he gasps, struggling to smile, and again she sweeps him into the flooding tide of her iniquity. In that brief scene (they took it slowly) every phase of human emotion came from their voices, gestures. He self-centred, reluctant to risk. She, annoyed, bitter, sarcastic, contemptuous. He sulky, turns back on her. She works herself up into a fury, dashes hands against the battlements. He gives way. Her “we fail”—the splendid scorn in her cry. She draws him aside, lowers voice, outlines the design. Irving shouts admiration, wonder, his eyes dilated, whole body quivering with homage for such a wife. “Bring forth men children only.” At that curtain I remember Gladstone in a box, hand behind ear, intent with admiration, rising to applaud with the whole house, old Drury Lane [actually the Lyceum], gloriously rejoicing.

As I knew his sons, Harry and Laurence—we were boys together—occasionally, I saw something of rehearsals. Irving was careful for other entrances. Act v, scene 8. *Macbeth*

feels safe from Birnam Wood and man not born of woman. Suddenly enters a Messenger with bad news. Irving leaps at him, catches him by the throat, nigh chokes the fellow. "The devil damn thee black." How he spat it out, shaking his sliver out. That was rehearsed a dozen times, and the man had to drink three pots of beer to recover.

Again, without his wife Macbeth is self-centred, Act v, scene 8, "I have lived long enough. . . ." Irving utterly dejected, voice bitterly miserable. For her still hoping. "Canst thou not minister. . . ." Eager pleading like a child shut out, exquisitely the words fell. Furious at refusal he turns away, as one would shout, "You and all your stuff be damned." The last blow, her death. Irving is utterly alone, naked in spirit, facing his enemies. "Creeps in this petty pace from day to day." He is walking at his own funeral. Each word uttered like a stroke of the Passing Bell.

Great actor, he took great care for stage setting; simplicity and strength in his surroundings were manifest. Many memories of him return as I write. Shylock to Terry's Portia. The Jew moneylender of the period, stalking the stage with clutching feet like the claws of a bird of prey, shoulders flapping like ill-omened wings. He seemed physically a vulture. Marvellous make-up, indescribable gesture.

*Aug. 27* That clever boy, Frank Dunn, called with the proofs of *Blessed Are the Rich* which he has read for me.

This is the young man who insisted that when, in French, Paris means the Greek hero and not the city it should have a circumflex accent. There's proof-reading for you! Told me that he went to Wolfit's *Macbeth* last night, and heard a woman in the row behind him say to her friend, "All I know about this play is that she murders him."

Sent this letter :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*

*Aug. 27, 44*

DEAR RAYMOND MORTIMER,

I have done a wicked thing. Not that I don't often do wicked things; it is the admission which is rare. Here is the thing that I have done. An earnest young American officer tackling me at the Café Royal the other evening on university life in England, I promised to send him the one and only authentic book on the subject. I was thinking, of

course, of *The Oxford Circus*, by yourself and the man Miles. I have just posted it to the young fellow at his Army address.

I have read this book four times. First, some twenty years ago on a wet and windy Easter Thursday on the draughty railway station at Great Yarmouth while I waited three hours for a friend. Second, on board ship, as I prefer being sick with laughing to the other sort. Third, passing between "the frore Chiltern Hills and the willow-shadowed water-meadows" on the way to and from Oxford in the early part of this war. (Have you seen, by the way, how hundred-per-cently William Hickey justifies my animadversions in *Ego* on that town's filthy manners? "The safer the area, the worse the manners. Oxford, for instance, is so filled with the disagreeable and the short-tempered as to be almost uninhabitable. I do not know how its evacuees put up with it.") Feeling a little depressed last week, I took your book down from its shelf and read it for the fourth time.

The object of this letter? To urge you to reprint this masterpiece. And to remind you of that promised luncheon which, I suggest, should take place at the Café Régale. The menu, of course, to consist of "*bortsch, langouste, escalopes d'agneau, épithaphes d'andouilles*—and *sorbet*." We drink, needless to say, "a cuvee of Veuve Amiot." If you will do this I will supply the "*esprit* and *persiflage, conte*" and even *rouspétance*. Yare, yare, good Mortimer! But there is nostalgia in your nonsense as well as fun. When will you and I next set out from Charing Cross and arrive at the Gare de Lyon (!). How long before we see the dawn break over your Ploumenar'ch-lez-Quémouk? But it bores an author to quote him to his face, and I desist.

No further news, except that I had rather a shock last night when I understood the wireless to say that the Russians had taken and occupied Gollancz. Much relieved to find this morning that I misheard; what was captured is not our Victor, but a place called Galatz.

Ever your  
JAMES AGATE

Aug. 28 Jock called. Reminded me that at the last broadcast of *Everyman* they faded out the Voice of God, saying, "You will now hear Sandy Macpherson on the organ. From the Granada Cinema, Tooting Bec." Or some such place. We agreed that the first condition of high office

at Broadcasting House is to have eaten of the insane root that takes the reason prisoner.

*Aug. 29* "Do I contradict myself? Very well, then, I *Tuesday*. contradict myself." For years I have pretended to like *Peer Gynt*. To-night I decided to stop pretending. Ibsen may, of course, have meant nothing more than a heavy satire upon Norwegian egoism, narrowness, and self-sufficiency. At least, that was Björnson's view. But what has that to do with me if I am bored? And was I bored to-night? I shall have to be on my guard in the *S.T.*, of course; the Old Vic are a touchy lot. Here is some of what I propose to do in the way of safeguards:

The fact that Norse fantasy may be absurd to the English mind and in translation does not mean that it is absurd absolutely and in the original. No German will ever "get" the fun of slithy toves gyring and gimbling in the wabe. I remember a film in which a high Nazi official repeated Lewis Carroll's line, saying: "Wabe"—he pronounced it in the German manner—"Was heißt Wabe?" Let it be confessed that I have no feeling for Norse trolls and gnomes. Perhaps that is because I find the Norse tongue "ustyggelig styggt," to use Peer's phrase for the unspeakably grim. I am prepared to weep buckets on behalf of "Madam Butterfly," but could not shed a tear for "Fru Butterflog."

The play is, of course, a producer's paradise, and Guthrie had obviously enjoyed himself. What pipes and timbrels! What wild ecstasy! What boygs and brownies! What wild button-moulding! In plain English, I thought that the production was superb, that Ralph Richardson was excellent in all three phases, and that everybody else died or got married or went mad more than competently. But it was one man's evening, as in the case of this play it always must be. Here is the actor's dream fulfilled: to be always on the stage and never stop talking. I left the theatre murmuring

"When Richardsons begin to Peer,  
With heigh! the doxy over the dale. . . ."

*Aug. 30* Have been reading Louis Nizer's *What to Do With Wednesday. Germany*. Well, what shall we do? Nothing, of course. We shan't do anything for half a dozen reasons, all of them the usual blend of New-Statesmanship, nincompoopery, and cant. What shall we pretend to do, then?

The old bleat about re-education. Whereat Germany will laugh. She has already started laughing, and the nearer she gets to defeat the louder she will laugh. The hordes fleeing towards the Rhine can hardly run for laughing. The Gestapo brutes will hardly be able to die for laughing—except that we shan't kill them. Hitler will choke himself to death with laughing—for he knows we shan't hang him. And why do they laugh? Because they know the British infirmity of purpose. Give *them* the daggers, and no Englishman would have to worry about another war. The Nazis laugh because they know that the third AND LAST world war is already won. Once more I repeat Northcliffe's " You must watch those Germans. They will cheat you yet! "

*Sept. 1* Supped with Gerald Barry and a man and woman *Friday*, whose names I didn't catch, both obvious intellectuals. The man held the Hitler régime to have proved that the leading German characteristic is malleability. From which I was to deduce that this country has only to send a sufficient number of teachers of the right sort to Germany, and the Nazis will at once shed their predatory instincts and become models of altruism. I said, " You can't lead a nation except in the way it wants to go." And I drew a picture of Germany addressing the all-too-real Hitler in the words Macbeth used to his imaginary dagger :

Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going ;  
And such an instrument I was to use.

But it was no good, and, listening to them, I was reminded of the rampant nonsense talked by President Wilson in 1917 : " We are not enemies of the German people, and they are not our enemies. They did not originate or desire this hideous war, and we are vaguely conscious that we are fighting their cause, as they will some day see it themselves." So laugh and be happy, Germans. You have won. *Heil Hitler!*

*Sept. 2* Part of a letter from Julian Phillipson, now a *Saturday* major in India :

Life out here is just . . . well, just life in India. I am terribly British : I play round after round of golf—abominably. I ride—as Coward would say, incessantly. I am steeped

in the élite of the Army, and a mere Brigadier gets a curt response on the telephone from me.

Delhi is a glorified Harrogate . . . not quite as "refained" and about twenty times duller. Apart from the Lutyens buildings, as imposing as uncomfortable—which is what I expected, having been in his houses—there is absolutely nothing. Everything very social, which was fun to begin with, but is now just a bore. I used to be impressed with the large dinner-parties we have, but now it is all very dull—the same faces, the same conversation.

India is far better left to the Indians. It really is the most frightful country—a country of apathy, squalor, and distrust. Where on earth all this glamour of the East is, I certainly, for one, have not been able to discover.

A little bit of civilisation and respite from G.S. Generals stepped into my life in the form of Noel Coward and Cecil Beaton. The former came round to drinks, and the latter stayed two days on his way to America. Noel was extremely good in his one-man show to the troops, which surprised me a lot, since I find his records intolerable. But from what I can glean from behind the scenes of Viceregal circles, the garland of popularity went quite decisively to our Cecil—who, incidentally, and as you probably know, is a thoroughly good sort.

I had time to ring up John Irwin before I left. He seems in pretty good form, and I was disappointed in not seeing him and talking about the good old days of Fairfax Road, when we were both two young fools who, for no apparent reason at all, imagined that we were budding dramatic critics. A far cry from those fond imaginings to, in the one case, Secretary to the Governor of Bengal, and in the other, A.D.C., Personal Assistant, and maid-of-all-work to a General! Not quite as exalted as Secretary to J. A. But both jobs will do for the time being. I do not expect to have any reply from you. You never were much of a correspondent.

*Sept. 3* Waiting for my bus the other evening, I heard a *Sunday.* woman who had just come away from *Cosi fan Tutti* at the Prince's say to her friend, "Oh, I *liked* it, dear. The costumes were heaven! But couldn't they have got some *other* music for it?" !!!!

A friend tells me that in one of the intervals of *Peer Gynt* he overheard this in the foyer :

HIGHBROW (*holding forth to a circle of admirers*). Of course it's sheer vandalism to hear foreign masterpieces in a translation. One should hear them *only* in the original.

COMMON LITTLE MAN (*butting in*). But I 'ave 'eard this in the original.

HIGHBROW. You have ? How very thrilling ! Tell me, what did it sound like ? Marvellous, of course.

COMMON LITTLE MAN. Dunno about marvellous. To me it sounded like the News in Norwegian !

*Sept. 5* I have been reading Rex Warner's new translation of *Tuesday*. the *Medea* of Euripides :

In my heart .  
I greatly dread that you are plotting some evil,  
And therefore I trust you even less than before.  
A sharp-tempered woman, or for that matter a man,  
Is easier to deal with than the clever type  
Who holds her tongue.

I really cannot see why this should not be printed as prose :

In my heart I greatly dread that you are plotting some evil, and therefore I trust you even less than before. A sharp-tempered woman, or for that matter a man, is easier to deal with than the clever type who holds her tongue.

*Sept. 6* Is Hollywood stark, staring mad ? I cull the *Wednesday*. following from its account of *Double Indemnity*, the new film at the Plaza :

The background of the picture is Los Angeles and Hollywood, although there is not a shot of a film studio anywhere in the story. Jerry's Market, Melrose Avenue, just around the corner from the Paramount Studio, served as the market where Fred MacMurray and Barbara Stanwyck meet clandestinely. The interior was reproduced on a studio sound stage, where shelves were stocked with groceries valued at approximately 1,000,000 ration points, and including such rarities as sliced pineapple, chocolate, solid-pack tomatoes, and the like ! The period of the story is 1938, so the market had to be authentic of that time. To guard the canned goods, four studio policemen, it is stated, stood guard on twenty-four-hour duty, as the commissary was to be held responsible for anything which might be missing. Cash value of the groceries was estimated at 20,000 dollars. Wilder,

incidentally, photographed the interior in such a way as to omit the meat counter. Filling it, as in 1938, would have been too difficult.

What in blazes does all this matter? Couldn't they have had empty cartons? Must Hollywood always black its Othellos all over? What does matter is that this is one of the very best films that has come out of Hollywood for a very long time. It is a magnificent murder story, with the moral that a man and woman who put their heads together to murder the woman's husband begin to loathe each other before the body is cold. I found it all extremely exciting. Barbara Stanwyck was completely convincing as the common, bloody-minded hussy.

*Sept. 10* This week has been a whirl of work, overwork, and *Sunday*. still more work. On Wednesday evening Bertie van

Thal asked me if I would like to write a reply to Osbert Sitwell's *A Letter to My Son*. (Bertie is part founder of the firm of Home and van Thal.) If he could have it in three weeks' time he could publish it by Christmas. I agreed, knowing that this means bringing into play my oldest neurosis, which is that I am compelled to do this thing straight off. If anyone gives me a year to write a book I must do it in a month; whoever gives me three weeks sentences me to three days of going without food, sleep, and everything else except work and whiskey. I began my little book at eleven o'clock on Wednesday night, and finished it at four o'clock this morning. Twelve thousand words of close reasoning, or as close as I can make it, without ornament or divagation. Spent the whole of to-day titivating the thing, and shall deliver it for typing to the delectable Cynthia first thing to-morrow morning. Am calling it *Noblesse Oblige*.

Of the things that happened during the past week I remember finding in a taxi a brief-case belonging to Kapp the artist. I returned it, receiving in magnanimous exchange a jolly cartoon of George Robey in *Helen!* Answered an accumulation of demands for lectures. To the Royal Institution. To the British Council at Edinburgh. To the South Devon Literary Society at Torquay. To a debating society at Llandudno. To some college society at Cambridge. To a girls' school in

Gloucester. And will I take part in a theatrical Brains Trust for the Vic-Wells Association at Preston ? Of the first six one offers me three guineas ! The others say nothing. Really there is a transcendentality . . . Preston, being Lancashire, has more sense ; its invitation has a P.S. saying, " How much ? "

Four letters.

1. From a lady in Chelsea :

When, during a recent holiday in Yorkshire, I visited Skipton, I saw there something that might interest you. In the fly-blown window of a tobacconist, flanked by dispirited tapers, was a small, tired box of gold-tipped, black Russian Sobranies. Propped against it was a card :

5/7 for 25

IDEAL FOR FUNERALS

Yet another for my brother Edward's *Ecole des Morts* series.

2. From a major in the Parachute Regiment :

In the recent advance of the Airborne Division my company had the task of forcing the crossing of an important river. The only way in which this concerned you directly was when the artillery came down, and the bridge that should have been intact was broken, and I was wondering what to throw away before I swam the river. I kept your *Red Letter Nights* in the top of my smock. It may be a small tribute, but it is meant as a tribute none the less, and as thanks for all the pleasure and instruction that you have given to so many of us. We took the crossing—we lost a lot of men—my leading sergeant was recommended for the V.C. We are now resting at a farm. We live on butter and honey, cake and cider, and I shall have my book to complete a very pleasant situation.

3. From a stranger :

On two occasions you have favoured us in the *Daily Express* with a list of what you consider are the twelve best books in the world. Of course no one would try to wade through all these unless he were cast away on a desert island or otherwise imprisoned for life. May I suggest that you print a list of what you consider the twelve worst books ever written ? This would be of the greatest assistance in selecting this year's Christmas presents.

I have also recently struggled through *Ego 2* and parts of *Ego 3*. Omitting great chunks about golf, food, and Hackneys, some of the other parts are not at all bad. By the time you reach ninety and *Ego 36* you ought to be doing this sort of thing rather well.

#### 4. From an airman in the last war :

In 1917 I was at Lydd, Kent, a wireless operator in the Royal Flying Corps. There came to us as a clerk, one named Leo Pavia. I found that L. P. had an awesome store of learning—and couldn't he talk! One day we lured him into the canteen, which sold good beer and had a bad piano. L. P., the pianist, was soon revealed, the centre of an entranced and open-mouthed audience. Under his touch the canteen piano reached its apotheosis as a musical instrument. At the first opportunity we, L. P.'s room-mates, hied to Folkestone. For Leo's benefit as well as our own, we rented a piano and bore it back in triumph to instal it in our quarters at Lydd. Soon after I was sent to France, and not until I opened your *Ego* did I hear of L. P. again. He will not remember me, but the enclosed group photograph bears me out. He stands third from the left in the back row. I am the centre man of the third row.

Yours devotedly,  
T. IDWAL JONES

Last, a p.c. from Jock on my sixty-seventh birthday :

8th September, 1944

DEAR JAMIE,

Happy birthday-card. Our Padre in the Hospital had this Fragrant Thought posted on his door this morning in what is known as The Wayside Pulpit : "Flowers are the loveliest things that God forgot to put a soul into." At once I went unto the Padre and respectfully protested, pointing out that the sentence was neither (a) good English, (b) good botany, nor even (c) good religion, since it implies—nay, declares—the possibility of oversight in the Almighty. A Wren-secretary was blamed, and the Thought was removed. Is not that one of your *Giganiesques* or *Cocasseries* ?

I am being sent to Ceylon in a fortnight and am dismayed. For one thing there will be no *Sunday Times* on Sunday morning. I rather doubt if there is any Cingalese Sunday morning either!

Your unjocose, unjocund, unJockish  
Jock

*Sept. 12* Some people think when I write "highbrow" I mean "intellectual." I don't. Perhaps Johnny Morton's best story will help:

A soldier said to an old lady, "So when we got to Wipers—" "Ypres," said the old lady. The soldier resumed: "So when we got to Wipers—" "Ypres," said the old lady. The soldier heaved a sigh, and began again: "So when we got to Wipers—" "Ypres," said the old lady. "Cor," said the soldier, "you ain't 'arf got 'iccups."

A highbrow, in my connotation, is an intellectual with hiccups.

*Sept. 18* Flabbergasted to find that G. M. Trevelyan's *Wednesday English Social History* has the following Publisher's

Note: "An American edition of this work was published in 1942, but owing to paper shortage over here in war-time it has only become possible to publish it in Great Britain in 1944." The book, which is a miracle of erudition, contains, roughly, a quarter of a million words. I have found out from authoritative sources that during the years 1942 and 1943—that is to say, in a time of total war—2967 works of fiction were published in this country. Taking it that sixty-seven of these were not the usual pin-headed drivel of the kind I wade through week after week, this means that paper was found for some 250,000,000 words of utter punk! But, of course, in the case of Trevelyan's work, paper couldn't be found for a mere 250,000 words of something akin to genius. Let the social historian of five hundred years hence try to explain *that* away! Mind you, I don't want a censorship of books. I hold that publishers should be free to print what they want. But I also hold, and hold strongly, that when this country produces a masterpiece the publishers should get together and say, "We are going to produce this book by hook or by crook, willy-nilly, and whatever the state of the paper situation. We'll pool it. Or we'll toss up which of us is to have it, and the rest of us will each contribute a bit of paper for it." I know publishers meet because I have addressed a meeting of publishers! Am suggesting in the *Express* that next time a book of first-class importance appears on the horizon the publishers shall call a meeting and address themselves!

Sept. 14      The "preliminary literature" to *An American Romance* promised a film about the real America. Whereupon I turned up Whitman's *Collect* and read again :

When I pass to and fro, different latitudes, different seasons, beholding the crowds of the great cities, New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Chicago, St Louis, San Francisco, New Orleans, Baltimore—when I mix with those interminable swarms of alert, truculent, good-natured, independent citizens, mechanics, young persons—at the idea of this mass of men, so fresh and free, so loving and so proud, a singular awe falls on me. I feel, with dejection and amazement, that among the geniuses and talented writers or speakers, few or none have yet really spoken to the people, created a single *image-making work* [italics mine] for them, or absorbed the central spirit and the idiosyncrasies which are theirs—and which, thus, in highest ranges, so far remain entirely uncelebrated, unexpressed.

When I got to the cinema I found that this "image-making work" was nothing more than an outsize documentary showing how flivvers and Fortresses are made, and what the inside of a steelworks looks like.

Sept. 15      As I sat attentive at Olivier's Richard III to-night Friday. I seemed to see an extraordinary succession of images—Charles II plotting mischief, any old actor's Robert Macaire and Alfred Jingle, any good actor's Iago and even Iachimo, and above all a great deal of Irving's Mephistopheles. People still talk of the way in which the Old Man would say about Martha, "I don't know what's to become of her—I won't have her!" Yes, there was a great deal of Irving in to-night's performance, in the bite and devilry of it, the sardonic impudence, the superb emphases, the sheer malignity and horror of it. If I have a criticism it is that Olivier is a little inclined to step out of the picture. Richard is immensely tickled at the virtuosity with which he proposes to take the world-stage, and in his hero's opening soliloquy Shakespeare is at great pains to convey this relish. But Olivier makes that speech rather more than something overheard. This Richard means us to overhear; we are positively tipped the wink.

Now are our brows bound with victorious wreaths ;  
 Our bruised arms hung up for monuments ;  
 Our stern alarms changed to merry meetings,  
 Our dreadful marches to delightful measures.  
 Grim-visaged war hath smooth'd his wrinkled front, I don't think :

Olivier may not say those last three words ; his eyebrows certainly signal them.

This Richard coheres from start to finish, and there is a complete presentation of the character as the actor sees it and his physical means permit. Yet one has to close one's ears to certain disadvantages. Take that moment when Stanley says "Richmond is on the seas," and Richard has his tremendous "There let him sink, and be the seas on him!" Like Irving, Olivier has not the voice for this. And it was here that old Martha came to mind, that I seemed to hear Irving chuckle "There let her sink, and be the seas on her!" It is a moot point whether Richard's "There is no creature loves me" should or should not crook a finger at pathos. Olivier says "No" firmly. This Richard is bent on carrying the joke through. And on the note of

March on, join bravely, let us to't pell-mell ;  
 If not to heaven, then hand in hand to hell

he brings the drama to a jaunty, Jingle-esque conclusion. To sum up, I don't think that this is Shakespeare's Richard. It could not be said of Laurence Olivier's Renaissance villain at the end that "The bloody dog is dead." (The boar was Gloucester's device, and "dog" is Shakespeare's equivalent.) But this Richmond wouldn't be able to say "dog." What he would say over Olivier's corpse is : "We have scotch'd the snake and kill'd it!" But even if this Richard is not Shakespeare's it is very definitely Olivier's. In one respect only do I fault John Burrell's production ; it is too glittering and too band-boxy. Everybody, like Pinero's French governess, is over-gowned and over-hatted. Let it be recorded that, according to the programme, Ralph Richardson appears as "Earl of Richmond, afterwards King Edward VII" ! !

*Sept. 16 Saturday.*      Jock puts his head through the door and says, "This is just to tell ye that I've wriggled oot of going to Ceylon. With great dignity."

*Sept. 17* Our Ernest is at it again. In to-day's *S.T.* he *Sunday.* writes :

When you diffidently suggest to one of the blind-spot Delians that one reason why Delius's operas, for instance, have not secured the place they deserve in the repertory may be that all his characters seem to speak much the same language, he will as likely as not, judging from my own experience, rejoin that the language is equally the same in all the Mozart or all the Wagner operas.

This is the flattest nonsense. I should never dream of saying this about Wagner. Introduce five bars of the Prelude to *Lohengrin* into the middle of the Prelude to *Tristan*, and I promise Ernest that I shall twig it. Let King Mark break into the Steersman's song from *The Flying Dutchman*, and even the Covent Garden audience would twig it. But if I were to insert, say, fifty bars of "Song before Sunrise" into "In a Summer Garden," I don't believe that one per cent. of the Albert Hall audience would notice it. I don't believe Delius himself would have noticed it. As a super-Delian put it at lunch to-day : "Delius is all intoxication, but it's all the same intoxication. Wagner has a hundred ways of making you tight." Of course Wagner has his finger-prints, but he was also a mighty composer of tunes, whereas Delius is all finger-prints and nothing you can hum. Musical thought? But what musicologists like Ernest always fail to realise is that a composer can cerebrate like six Senior Wranglers and argue like twelve Immanuel Kants, but that it will avail him nothing if he can't think of a tune; that what the ordinary music-lover is critical of is not pure reason but pure sound. I had just written the last word when from the wireless came the plaintive strains of "On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring." Leo said, "This music moves me to tears, it's so *autumnal!*"

*Sept. 18* Looked again into Paul Wilstach's *Life of Richard Monday. Mansfield*, which has a great deal about that actor's Richard III, including the Preface to his version of that play. In this Mansfield puts the case not only for Richard as a good-looking man—"The Countess of Desmond, who danced with him at King Edward's Court, declared him 'the handsomest man in the room, his brother, the King, excepted'"—but as a non-criminal :

The deformity of his mind, as drawn by Shakespeare, has to be adhered to, although history fails to corroborate it. Richard did not slay Edward, the son of Henry VI, he did not kill King Henry, he did not murder his Queen, the Lady Anne, and there are grave doubts as to his having been implicated in the deaths of Edward V and his brother, absolutely no evidence existing that Henry VII did not find both Princes alive upon his succession.

This is indeed to make Richard the mildest-manner'd man that ever cut a throat. But I gather that Mansfield had the sense to act Shakespeare's man and not history's. When Mr G. produced *Macbeth* I remember discussing with him the length of time that is supposed to elapse between the murder of Duncan and the final catastrophe, in history a matter of some twenty years. His answer was the very good one that Shakespeare always wrote for swift performance, which corroborates my notion that in the play of *Macbeth* some two years elapse. Mansfield raises a similar point in connection with *Richard III*. The battle of Tewkesbury took place on May 4, 1471, and Henry's death, probably murder, some fortnight later. Mansfield points out that at this date Richard was only nineteen. Since the battle of Bosworth occurred on August 22, 1485, it follows that we must suppose fourteen years to elapse. I have never seen any Richard who conveyed this, and for the good reason that Shakespeare ignores the time-lag. I remember a production—I forget whose—in which Richmond dropped his sword and let the daggerless Richard claw the air and make ineffectual attempts to beat him down with his bare hands. I want something more. I want Richard to *hear* the words "The bloody dog is dead." I want to see him try to rise as Richmond puts his foot on him. I want to see in Richard's face the sense of defeat as well as the terror of dying.

Sept. 19 From C. B. Cochran :

Tuesday.

*St James's Court  
Buckingham Gate, S.W.*

*The Sunday of "King Richard III"*

MY DEAR JAMES,

Since last Thursday afternoon, when I saw *Richard III*, I have been impatient for this morning. Your essay is masterly

—I cannot imagine a more distinguished bit of criticism. It is so right and so very clear.

It is a superb achievement on the part of Olivier, but as I told Evelyn (she did not see the play with me), he plays it on the lines of Irving's Mephistopheles ; and spoken as Larry speaks them, the lines lend themselves very well to this treatment. The funeral procession—Lady Anne scene—was in every particular strangely like my old governor's (Richard Mansfield's). I thought it very fine. R. M. always imagined that Kean played this scene on the same lines. Even the more anti-Mansfield critics admitted the beautiful quality of his voice, which, to his credit, he never overplayed. I found the long afternoon at the New short and exhilarating. The whole Vic-Richardson-Olivier enterprise is tremendously interesting.

How right you are about the clothes ! Everybody (except the Lord Mayor) had been to the same fashionable tailor, and they were all wearing their Sunday best for the first time. When Mansfield produced *Cyrano de Bergerac* I took over to him an exact reproduction of Coquelin's production—*i.e.*, ten costumes. Five or six dress parades, with stage lighting, were held while Mansfield (a good painter) directed the breaking of them down until they lost all appearance of stage or fancy-dress costumes. The result was a series of real-life pictures of the period represented. I horrified Dulac when I did the same with his lovely costumes for the production I made at the Garrick with Bob Loraine. As one of the stage managers said : " In three hours the Governor's knocked three thousand quids' worth of costumes down to threepence ! "

I have sold my last piano, my understudy pictures are on my walls, but I have the price of a lunch for you any day and place at your choice. A suggestion would give me great pleasure.

Yours as ever,  
CHARLES B. COCHRAN

P.S. Shaw told me Barry Sullivan's Richard III was terrific. I think Wolfst's is grand, and I still think his Lear is the best Shakespearean performance I have seen in thirty years.

Sept. 20 Ran into Malcolm Sargent at the Ivy. He said Wednesday. Delius has only one emotion—the expression of loveliness. " His music knows nothing about passion, hate, anger, jealousy, or the emotions of ordinary

people ; his concern is solely the expression of beauty. And I personally don't want it to be anything more." Somebody said, " But surely that limits the man as an artist ? " SARGENT. " Why ? I shouldn't regard a mystic who spent his life in an effort to achieve unity with the Deity as a limited being." J. A. " Perhaps not. But I should regard an evening spent watching a Buddhist contemplate his navel as a limited form of amusement. Ten minutes of it would be enough for me ; and I have had my fill of Delius after ten minutes." Sargent went on to talk about modern idiom in music and the folly of believing that, because Man has invented the aeroplane, music should sound like a factory turning out Spitfires.

### *Trouvailles*

Yes indeed, the pendulum has come full cycle.

GODFREY WINN, *Home from Sea*

Sept. 22 A well-meaning gentleman from St Leonards ends Friday. his letter with this :

As one with a friendly feeling towards you, may I tender a word of advice ? After perusing two of your *Ego's* I was struck with one lamentable fact. You seem to lose much precious time. Perhaps " waste " is a better word. A man with your capacity should not squander Time in that fashion. You seem to live without a Compass, without order or precision, and even without balance. That seems a tragedy. If you can alter that mode of Life, and concentrate on something vital, you may really become important to literature.

Is that so ? Well, let's take an average day in my " wasteful " life and see what happens. To-day, for instance, I receive by the morning's post :

Letter from Blisworth enclosing play about Rachel.

Parcel from Dublin enclosing two plays, one about Kosciusko, the other about Lesbianism.

Film scenario treating of the career of Jenny Lind and introducing Mendelssohn, Chopin, George Sand, and the usual gang.

The MS. of a novel called *Czech Mate*, dealing with the life of John Huss.

Between twenty and thirty sets of verses, some in booklet form, others in MS. One of these masterpieces begins :

Sing a song of reconstruction,  
Saving England from destruction.  
Sing of Beveridge and Scott,  
Barlow, Woolton, and Uthwatt.

Exhausted with all this, I remember I have promised to take a friend to a cinema. I wait the usual twenty minutes for a taxi and hie me to the X Theatre, where I have to sit through some terrible rubbish about two sisters, rival rulers on some perfumed island in the South Seas. One is Bonanza, a dark, wicked, scheming hussy who poisons her lovers by the aid of a mysterious scent-spray containing a deadly germ. The other is Bolonza, a fair, sweet, virtuous girl devoted to birds. They both fall in love with Posh M'Ginnis, a handsome American airman whose plane has crashed on the island. Bonanza's advances are repulsed by Posh, and she gropes for the scent-spray, but her murderous intentions are foiled by a little native boy, Bogu, who throws her into the sea. After which the natives celebrate Bolonza's wedding with Posh by dancing the hula-hula and drinking bula-bula.

I snatch a hasty mouthful of lunch and arrive back to find some twenty more letters have arrived, half of which contain requests for Trevelyan's book, the other half seeking my help and advice on subjects ranging from Basic English to the name of a good undertaker. They all have stamped addressed envelopes for reply. As I am wrestling with these a boy arrives from the *Daily Express* with six novels for review and twenty-five more letters. Among these I find a long screed from a lady in Stockton-on-Tees enclosing her interpretation of *Heartbreak House*, written, she says, some twenty years ago. This begins :

It is inconceivable that a nation which produced some of the greatest allegories in the world—*The Faerie Queen*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *Comus*, and *The Shaving of Shagpat*, to mention only a few—should contain critics unable to understand the allegory of *Heartbreak House*. The allegory of *Heartbreak House* is simpler than the allegory of *Peer Gynt* or Strindberg's *Indra's Daughter*. Captain Shotover is Humanity in its long voyage of adventure through the seas of time. . . .

And so on and so forth. She must have sent this to G. B. S., since enclosed I find a dozen lines, in that exquisite handwriting like a fly which has been trained at the Russian Ballet, saying that their author does not write paraphrases of abstract syntheses of society, and that his interpretations of his plays have no more authority than hers, and would possibly not be so interesting. Now the lady's letter to me, her interpretation of *Heartbreak House*, and Shaw's comments all have to be returned, with a polite note saying how greatly I have been instructed, edified, and amused. All of which, believe me or not, takes time.

By the four o'clock post arrive sixteen more letters, one registered ("Dear Mr Agate, I have registered my poems so that I shall know you have received them safely. Will you please, etc., etc."), two more novels, *Betwixt the Sheets* and *Love in the Tree-tops*, the libretto of an opera about Confucius, and a book teaching Western Europeans to distinguish between the dialects of Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, and Bosnia. I open the letters and find a request, from a musical society in Birkenhead, to give a lecture on "Modern Music" with especial references to Béla Bartók and the use of Hungarian folk-song in chamber music. Winding up with a letter from Ipswich, asking if I will contribute an essay to a volume entitled *Mothercraft*. I sit down gasping like a hippopotamus and, with Leo's help, answer most of the correspondence. By this time it is five o'clock, and I remember that I must now write for the *Sunday Times* what I thought about *Felicity Jasmine*, Wednesday night's play at the St James's. The title refers to a perfume which, rubbed by English minxes behind the ears of American soldiers, increases the minxes' power of attraction while reinforcing the American soldiers' power of resistance. Mopping my brow, I remember that I have also to write about last night's farce at the Saville, *Three's a Family*, in which Vera Pearce managed to look like a composite figure of Boadicea, the Statue of Liberty, and Mrs Partington. I knock off this with great wit and comparative celerity. And now, I say to myself, I shall have a snooze.

Shall I? The bell rings. A friend rushes in and says, "I have a cab outside—we're late," "Late for what?" "Good heavens!" cries the friend. "Didn't you promise to take me

to the new film at the Arlington ? ” My imploring looks are of no avail. The inexorable cab is waiting, also the implacable friend, so I bestir myself and spend the next three hours watching another idiotic film. And now, well-meaning gentleman from St Leonards, what about that wasting and squandering of precious time ? I live without a compass, heh ? I have no order, precision, balance ? I am to concentrate on something vital ? You mind your own business, sir, “ an’ stupify your foolishness be gettin’ dhrunk.”

*Sept. 23      From the Editor of the Polish News :  
Saturday.*

Misprints are always for me, as an editor, a nightmare. What a pity that they are unavoidable. A few days ago I found in a footnote to Poe’s tale, *The Mystery of Marie Roget*, instead of “ Parisian grisette ” “ Persian grisette.” I don’t know if it is true, but I heard that the only European newspaper which completely avoided misprints was the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. They constructed a special cabin for proof-readers, lined with cork, but even this could not protect them from doing something by comparison with which the biggest misprints are as nothing. A few years prior to this war they published a whole collection of Napoleon’s letters “ discovered ” in an Austrian château, when these letters had been printed before and were very well known to every historian of those times !

*Sept. 24      Some years ago I contributed, to a volume published by Chapman and Hall entitled *A Pickwickian Gallery*, a chapter which I called “ The Smallest Fry.” This included such obscure people as Mrs Mudberry, “ which kept a mangle,” and Mrs Bunkin, “ which clear-starched.” Also the Pot-boy, the Muffin Youth, the Baked-potato Man, the large-headed Young Man in a black wig who brought with him to Bob Sawyer’s party a Scorbatic Youth in a long stock, the Gentleman at the same party who wore a shirt emblazoned with pink anchors, the Pale Youth of the plated watch-guard, the Prim Man in the cloth boots who had forgotten his anecdote but hoped he should manage to recollect it in the course of half an hour or so. Yesterday Arthur Moreland, who is going on for eighty, gave me a copy of*

A. L. Hayward's *The Dickens Encyclopædia*, which he thought more practical than leaving it me in his will. As I have posed as an authority on Dickens, at least as regards some of his minor characters, I decided to play a game with myself and test my memory by shutting my eyes and dabbing into the encyclopædia with a pencil. The result ? I found that I didn't remember that the inebriated gentleman in the last depths of shabbiness who played calm and virtuous old men in Mr Crummles's company was called Fluggers. I had forgotten that the youngest Pardiggle, the five-year-old who was pledged never through life to use tobaccoe in any form, was named Alfred. Similarly it had escaped me that Graymarsh was the name of the pupil at Dotheboys Hall whose maternal aunt thought Mrs Squeers an angel. Here and there I scored small successes. I had not forgotten that Mr Pidger was that former suitor of Miss Lavinia Spenlow, by virtue of whom she claimed to be an authority on affairs of the heart. I knew all about Sir Tumley Snuffim, and Mrs Bayham Badger's three husbands. But, alas, I had forgotten that the Chairman of the United Metropolitan Improved Hot Muffin and Crumpet Baking and Punctual Delivery Company was Sir Matthew Pupker. And I was horrified to find that I did not remember that Lady Scadgers was Mrs Sparsit's great-aunt, bed-ridden for fourteen years. Was it, perhaps, disgraceful not to recognise in "Lambs could not forgive nor worms forget" the accents of Mrs Gamp ? More forgivable, perhaps, to be caught out over Spiller and Spoker, the artists who executed the portrait and bust of Mr Pecksniff. P.'s Christian name ? Seth, of course. What relation to old Martin Chuzzlewit ? Cousin. To Jonas Chuzzlewit ? Father-in-law. Which daughter married Jonas ? Mercy. Name of t'other daughter ? Charity. Engaged to whom ? Augustus Moddle. Was this engagement carried out ? No. And here I find the author of this admirable encyclopædia nodding. Under "Moddle, Augustus," I read : "On the eve of the wedding he departed for *America*." And under "Pecksniff, Charity," "On the eve of the wedding, however, Moddle disappeared, preferring the uncertainties of *Tasmania* to the certain misery of life with Charity." And I notched one other point against the compiler : no information is given as to who called whom "My Frooshan Blue."

*Sept. 26*    *The Hitler Gang* (Carlton) is the melodramatic title *Tuesday*. of a film which is reconstructional in method and documentary in effect. It tells Hitler's story from 1918 onward, and is wonderfully helped by an unknown film actor named Robert Watson. Here, to the life, are the watery eye, the fish-like stare, the odd suggestion of George Moore, that indescribable garment which is half cassock and half raincoat, that something between visionary and taxi-driver which is Hitler. As Goebbels, the actor called Martin Kosleck looks exactly like the pictures of that diabolical little genius, and perfectly reproduces that smoothness amounting almost to charm with which he is always credited by people who have met him. There is one respect in which Hollywood is entirely incorrigible—the perpetual use of American phraseology. Hollywood must know that the film is intended to be shown in this country as well as in America. Then why not use words that are current in both countries instead of the American form? Both the English and American languages contain the word "perhaps"; only America uses the expression "maybe." Both countries have the word "reckon"; only Americans prefer "figure." The word "arrange" is common to both countries; only Americans insist on "fix." Goering saying, "My wife has some money; maybe I could use it"; Himmler saying, "I figure we need two thousand men"; Goebbels saying, "I'll fix it later"—all these make one feel one is in Hollywood. Whereas, if the English words were used, both countries would continue in the convention that the people on the screen are Germans talking German. I shall have another go at this in the *Tatler*, which I have reason to know Hollywood reads. But will it make any difference? No. Hollywood, as one of our film critics wrote, "has other fish to fry besides the whitchbait of linguistic elegance."

Afterwards to lunch at Kemsley House, where the Chairman of the *Sunday Times* was entertaining the contributors. Round the table, clock-wise, were Lord Kemsley, Ernest Newman, Brigadier E. C. Anstey, Colston Shepherd, Eric Newton, Valentine Heywood, C. E. Gayton, Dilys Powell, W. K. Bliss, Norman Crump, J. A., Lady Kemsley, Desmond MacCarthy, Lionel Berry, Douglas Woodruff, Cyril Lakin, D. R. Gent, Leonard Russell, G. R. Osler, Hanslip Fletcher, R. C. K. Ensor, and W. W.

Hadley. There was a very pleasant little ceremony afterwards, when Kemsley made a graceful speech and presented Ernest Newman and me with gold watches in recognition of our long service. Ernest made an excellent speech in reply. Mine was, I thought, a little lame, though I redeemed it at the end with this story : Chatting to a total stranger in a bar, I said I didn't think the rocket-bombs had done a great deal of harm. "I don't know so much aboht that," said the stranger. "The one wot fell at New Cross last week did for my old man." I made the appropriate noises. He went on : "Not as 'is death was unexpected, seeing as 'ow 'e was ninety-four."

Later. Was so pleased with my present that I rang up a Jewish friend and asked if he would like to know the time ? He said he thought the joke in poor taste and rang off. It was 6.50. I asked Leo the reason for this unaccustomed brusqueness. He said, "He thought you were pulling his leg ; the Day of Atonement starts in ten minutes ! "

*Sept. 27* The Government is most unlucky. Some little *Wednesday*. time ago it issued a report to the effect that the flying bomb had been mastered. The papers made great display of this, and that afternoon at four o'clock the first of the rocket-bombs fell. A few days later the Government announced the end of the official evacuation of children. Whereupon the evacuees immediately started to flock back ; and almost simultaneously, the flying bombs started again ! The papers told of many tragedies ; one in particular, that of a father and mother with their four children, who had arrived back from the country only the day before, was heart-rending. Next the Government makes a detailed and lengthy announcement about its plans for demobilisation ; and immediately the disaster of Arnhem happens. To-day it tells us the names of the British officials who are to run Germany after the war. Whereupon I take up my paper and read : "This is, of course, a strategic setback. The Arnhem bridge is the back-door into North-west Germany. We pushed it ajar, but the enemy's speedy reaction slammed it again. Other methods will have to be tried. There may now be an irritatingly slow period while General Dempsey . . ." But can't the Government see that the period will seem slower and will cause greater irritation

because of all this chatter about demobilisation ? I am perfectly aware that post-war plans of all sorts must be put in hand. But why can't the Government keep quiet about them ? Or is the trouble farther back ? Is it Parliament which clamours to be told about them ? Is it the Press or the people ? If the latter, then this is the place to say that I am a very poor democrat. I hold that in time of war the people should do what they are told and shut up.

*Sept. 28*      Lunched with C. B. Cochran at the Ivy. I found *Thursday*. him looking extremely well and in excellent spirits.

We talked about the actors who had enhanced their reputation during the war, and he was full of praise for Wolfit. "For years he never knew where the money to pay his company was to come from. His first real money-maker was *King Lear* ; that in itself is a record ! He has never allowed himself to be beaten, and I think besides being a very fine actor he deserves immense praise for his pluck." He talked a good deal about Richard Mansfield, and said that in his opinion he had more brains than any other actor of his time. I told him the story of Seymour Hicks's shortened version of *Richard III*, related to me by Michael Shepley, who got it from an actor who was in the cast at the Coliseum. In spite of his immense charm, Seymour has always been terrifying to act with, and it seems that the young man who had to present Richard with a scroll of something or other was so frightened that he dried up. Whereat Richard roared, "What's that ? The washing-list ?" C. B. said, "Yes, but it didn't happen on the first night. I know my Seymour. After the third night he couldn't have resisted it !"

*Sept. 29*      Letter from Stanley Rubinstein :  
*Friday*.

5 & 6 *Raymond Buildings*  
*Gray's Inn, W.C.1*  
28th September, 1944

DEAR JIMMIE,

As a film expert you will know how to interpret the following trailer :

1944]

EGO 7

COMING NEXT WEEK

YOUR RED LETTER DAY

A SURPRISE !

A THRILL !!

A SHOCK !!!

CAN YOU TAKE IT ?

Yours,  
STANLEY

*Sept. 30 Saturday.* Lunched at the Athenaeum with D. S. MacColl, a wonderful man who doesn't look more than sixty and is actually eighty-five ! Summarised, his talk amounted to this : He said there was possibly a case to be made for Bacon's part-authorship of the plays, but that the poetry was wholly that of Shakespeare, who must therefore be regarded as the predominant partner. That to qualify for to-day's luncheon he went last night to the theatre, a thing he disliked doing, and entirely on the strength of what I had written about Olivier's Richard. That he thought it a very fine performance and singularly like Irving's. That he had never cared much about English acting since he saw Salvini play Othello in Florence—not the watered-down version he gave over here. That he would rather go to an exhibition of bad pictures than not go to any exhibition at all. And added, he supposed it was the same thing with me in the matter of plays. I said, "With plays, no ; with films, yes." He said, "I don't like films. I like the look of something *happening*. If I must go to see acting I like to see something in a frame, and the frame must stay put and not change every ten seconds." I asked him his views about modern poetry, and he said, "The worst of it is bunkum, and the best of it is a guessing competition." He went on : "But this so-called modern stuff isn't modern at all ; it was all thrashed out years ago in an essay by Coventry Patmore. But nobody took any notice."

*Oct. 1 Sunday.* To illustrate "that quality of elliptical association which so often, if not always, is so important a constituent in poetry which may legitimately be called 'pure,'" V. Sackville-West, in to-day's *Observer*,

quotes the following from a volume of poems by Frederic Prokosch :

When dusk caresses all our heads,  
When all the curtains touch the sill,  
When darkness cloaks the troubled beds  
And torches dot the hill.

When ships divide the intriguing night,  
When lust new agonies explores,  
When sailors watch the flickering light  
Along their luckless shores.

When all the impassioned lovers kiss,  
When madmen count the stars anew,  
When whales in their gigantic bliss  
Lie trembling two by two. . . .

#### V. Sackville-West then asks :

What are the whales doing here ? They startle us by their sudden appearance after the homely observation of curtains touching the sill, yet any appreciative reader will instantly recognise that they are exactly right in the place where they occur.

But why whales ? Why not any other mammal ? I spent half an hour this morning composing three verses where the equally unexpected seems to me to be equally right :

When gum-trees droop a sleepy head,  
When bridegrooms first in earnest woo,  
When kangaroos hop into bed,  
Twining a tail or two.

When school-marms still their charges' fears,  
When kings and queens enjoy a romp,  
When crocodiles forgo their tears,  
Canoodling in the swamp.

When stable-doors are locked at night,  
When lechers brace their muscles tense,  
When pigs with wings are steep in flight—  
Then singing whales make sense.

Note the "elliptical association" in the fifth and seventh lines. This presumes that modern school-marms still retain the 'crocodile.'

*Oct. 2* The proofs of the new version of *Gemel in London Monday.* and of *Noblesse Oblige* arrived by the same post. Turning over the former, I am agreeably surprised to find a passage which, written as long ago as 1927, foreshadows

everything I have said in the *Ego* books not only about modern art but also about the Sitwellian attitude to war and the artist. As I do not believe that anybody is ever going to read a novel of mine, I reproduce that passage here. Rubicon, the musical critic, is lecturing his secretary, young Gemel Lindsay :

" Now take this modern stuff. Don't be put off a new work by the crew who listen to it. What Goncourt ought to have said was : ' Ce que je déteste dans la musique, ce sont les idiots qui écoutent ! ' Don't be put off by painters with sparse and ridiculous beards, poets with Bloomsbury in their hair, the young men and women who are so terribly lovely that, as Wendy says, they don't quite know which sex they belong to. Art, my dear boy, is no longer the lonely thing it was. It has got a half-sister which is called Expressionism, and you young men will have to make up your minds about that. Suppose I set out to paint last week's eclipse. If, as a representational painter, I put on canvas a piece of Gorgonzola cheese which Fortnum and Mason would recognise, and call it ' Total Eclipse,' you are entitled to say that I have painted a lie. But if I say that that was how I felt on getting out of bed at six o'clock on a peculiarly filthy morning, and that the picture is my *expression* of the sun and what was happening to it—if it pleases me to say *that*, why then you can't object. The point, of course, is that until the public has been educated to see beauty in a non-representational way it cannot distinguish between spoof expressionism and the real thing. Nor does the spoof article affect expressionist art, if such a thing exists, any more than the fraudulent medium affects spiritualism (if there is such a thing as spiritualism). That I can write a poem which will successfully spoof the lank-haired satellites streaming in the Sitwellian wake does not affect either for good or evil the genuine productions of those genuine Muses. Take that thing we saw together the other night—*The Tale of the Soldier*. I suppose you'll tell me, Gemel, that as a play the thing was so inbocile as to be totally unactable and fit only to be danced. I agree. As a play it was spoof. But I don't agree that Stravinsky's music was spoof. It was the real genuine expressionist stuff, and personally I thought it hideous. Yet I'm not such a fool as not to realise that if Stravinsky had liked he could have given us a score ravishingly lovely in the normal way. But that's not what he was after. What is any artist after ? In the old days one simply said—the expression of beauty. Now that cock won't fight any longer,

and we must substitute the expression of mind. In the old days this was achieved through a medium which had an agreeable effect on the senses. The modern artist expresses mind through a medium which has a wilfully disagreeable effect on the senses. . . . There's one more thing. Don't take art too seriously. A golfer who is one down and two to play in a championship final must fight as though there were nothing else in the world except golf. If somebody comes and tells him that his wife has dropped down dead he is not the less an affectionate husband because he merely says, 'She should have died hereafter. Give me the spoon, boy.' For the moment he is a golfer and nothing but a golfer. If ever you become a musical critic, Gmel, you are, for the time you are listening to music, a musical critic and nothing else. You don't become human till the conductor has put down his stick. At the same time you've got to realise that music is only one thing in the world. That the painter is a better man than the person who looks at his picture only in so far as painting goes. That the bricklayer is *in point of brick-laying* vastly superior to Beethoven, me, or anybody else who can't lay one brick on the top of another. You must never let your work as an artist override your humanity. It is not a crime for a man to know nothing about art and care less. Some day I intend to write a book about this."

It seems to me that seventeen years later, in *Noblesse Oblige*, I wrote this book.

*Oct. 8      Letter from Jock :  
Tuesday.*

*S.B.A. A——D——  
P/MX 536400  
G1 Mess  
R.N. Barracks  
Portsmouth*

*1st October, 1944*

**DEAR JAMIE,**

Eighteen years ago to-day since I joined your staff—*id est*, became your secretary or staff, as 'twere—and now I find myself, on the verge of forty, the most useless sailor that never sailed except George Felton Mathew (only it runs in my mind that dear George once *did* sail in a liberty-boat or something and capsized a rear-admiral, two petty-officers, and five seamen in the process)!

I do not *try* to be useless. I am not entirely and utterly

unpractical. I pointed out to Haslar R. N. Hospital over and over again, in the eight months I spent there, that I could (a) spell, (b) write legibly, and (c) manipulate a typewriter. What did they do? They made me, as culmination to my naval career at Haslar, a "runner," put me between the shafts of a truck, and set me wheeling around various loads of victuals, churns of milk, and laboratory specimens that shall go undifferentiated and nameless.

Strenuous avoidance of that draft to Ceylon I told you about has now pitchforked me into R. N. Barracks at Portsmouth! And what idiotic thing they will do with me here remains to be seen. I am at the moment an errand-boy in a place that is a mixture of Dante's Hell and Denham Film Studios. I have already discovered the job I could do best if I am to stay here and not take a commission (which occupies a whole year and has many disadvantages besides its obvious advantages.) It is to work in the Medical History Sheet department, which is a matter of filing and indexing—my cup of tea, you will agree. All that is required to do useful work in M.H.S. is a thorough knowledge of the English alphabet—a rare accomplishment which I possess. The job is therefore given to a crew of S.B.A.'s and Wrens who have to think hard before deciding whether C comes before D, or R before S, and who are utterly bewildered when they have to decide whether M'Gillivray comes before M'Laughlan, or even Moggs before Morrison. But the point is not so much that they are utterly bewildered. Rather it is that they don't give a damn, and shove the thing in anywhere. This disgusting "What does it matter anyhow?" attitude is as rife in the Royal Navy as anywhere else. We win wars in spite of it—not because of it.

I shall write you further when I can find the hole-and-corner and the ten minutes.

Ever,  
Jock

P.S. Why, by the way, do you call a poorish book on Daly's Theatre "delightful"? You must only have looked at its photographs of Lily Elsie and Evie Greene. It is ill-written, disorderly, non-chronological, unconsultable, fond, and uncritical. What you mean is that it has a delightful *subject*.

Oct. 4        Have received the first number of a journal  
Wednesday. entitled *Prospect: The Voice of the Younger  
Generation of Poets.* I open and read:

I'll push my fist thru' my mother's womb  
 To break this cruel limitation  
 Of temperament and style.  
 Help me to liquidate this doctor's son,  
 This thief, this bum.  
 Then listen for a song  
 That is to revolution  
 What the lark is to the sun.

I look up my *Martin Chuzzlewit* and I find :

" Mind and matter," said the lady in the wig, " glide swift into the vortex of immensity. Howls the sublime, and softly sleeps the calm Ideal, in the whispering chambers of Imagination. To hear it, sweet it is. But then, out-laughs the stern philosopher, and saith to the Grotesque, ' What ho ! arrest for me that Agency. Go, bring it here ! ' And so the vision fadeth."

I am thinking of starting a journal entitled *Retrospect : The Voice of the Older Generation of Novelists*.

*Oct. 5 Letter from Stanley Rubinstein :*

*Thursday.*

*5 & 6 Raymond Buildings  
 Gray's Inn, W.C.1*

*Oct. 8, 1944*

**DEAR JIMMIE,**

Your life has probably been riddled with red letter nights, but this is a red-letter day compared to which all other ruddy days must assume a pale pink hue.

As the President-Elect of the Hackney Horse Society, you will wish me to cut the cackle and come to the 'osses. Without more ado, therefore, let me announce that you are now out of the Inland Revenue's debt. Or to put it another way—but with equal emphasis—you do not owe the Inland Revenue one single penny for surtax or income tax.

For a few days you may feel like a fish out of water ; you may be moved to declare, " Farewell ! Othello's occupation's gone ! " Or even " Farewell ! O'Stanley's occupation's gone ! " But of course it is not ! On the 1st of January next you will receive a substantial claim for income and surtax, so we must bend all our energies towards the collection of the necessary money, and to that end I am purchasing with all available cash Tax Reserve Certificates, which carry interest at the rate of 1 per cent., free of tax.

Yours exultantly,  
**STANLEY**

1944]

EGO 7

I feel that anything that I could say would be both inadequate and supererogatory. That Stanley's letter should be left, like Sir John Moore's corse, alone with its glory.

Oct. 6      Letter from Kenneth Hopkins :  
Friday.

10535892 *L/Cpl. H. K. Hopkins*  
108 *Mobile Laundry & Bath Unit*  
*R.A.O.C.*  
*B.L.A.*

29 Sept. '44

DEAR JAMES AGATE,

Please don't put me in *Ego 7* : I can't afford eighteen shillings every couple of years.

I believe there is a falling-off ; guard against it. The reader's enjoyment is not less, but the amount you personally contribute to it is. Let us have more of James Agate and less of his clever friends. There is a danger that you will be publishing imitations of *Ego* instead of continuations. My first impression is perhaps not fair, but I put great reliance on first impressions, and I believe they often count for more than revised judgments. I feel that this volume is a little too much of a commonplace book. Now I approve of commonplace books and keep one myself. Maybe you do, too—but *Ego* isn't, or shouldn't be, it. *Ego*, after all, is a man's life—at least his public face with occasional hints at what's behind.

Successive *Ego*'s should be successive skins peeled from the onion ; as a man grows older he will care less for opinion and appearances and will be increasingly indiscreet (like some old earl in Wodehouse) and self-revealing. Heaven knows how many reticences there are in *Ego* so far. You say well on page 70 that some things are not for the public. But don't leave the public with a cardboard fellow who ate and drank and (like a dog) went about the city.

Some of the best passages are those in which you have your slippers on and Leo is reminded by a chance remark of something that happened in, say, '08. The domestic scene—curtains drawn ; nothing exciting in the afternoon post ; the telephone not, for the moment, in use. No one is looking or listening, no effect has to be created, no puppy-poet has to be out-smarted, and we have a couple of coves who have seen and thought and heard far more than most, ready to spill a bean or two.

For me, with J. A., the book is Leo Pavia, and I look for more of these two. What a portrait you give of him—

standing talking to empty houses, collaring some one's chicken-leg, talking about the whores in the family. Leo (to me) is much more rewarding than Alan Dent. The photograph of him is exactly right, and if it were not an impertinence I'd ask him for a copy of it. In fact, although it is an impertinence I hereby do so ask.

I was dismayed by your opening remarks ; no *Ego*'s 7, 8, 9 . . . ? No *Ego* 10 ? Have you forgotten our last ride together—it was also our first, I believe—in which you told me you aimed at ten ? You told me a good many things in that taxi, not all of them directly or by word of mouth. I am not a poet for nothing, and my appreciation of you is not all taken from your books.

Six volumes is neither one thing nor the other. The journals of Grant Duff run to a score or more, all printed, and those of A. C. Benson to as many—all unprinted, except for the selections. I'm not going to catalogue all the diarists I can think of, to show my breadth of reading ; but I would remind you that we read diaries for more than to know that the writer dined with Lord P.

I must say again, in conclusion of the above scattered remarks, that the book doesn't suffer as entertainment ; the book is as good as ever. Only Agate retires into the shadow.

My greetings and good wishes to Mr Pavia and yourself ; and so farewell.

Yours sincerely,  
KENNETH HOPKINS

Reply to a gentleman in Suffolk who insists on my contributing to a book on the education of children :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*  
*Oct. 6th, 1944*

DEAR SIR,

I am steady in my refusal to contribute to your book on *Mothercraft*. I am not interested in mothercraft, or needlecraft, or any kind of craft except my own. Ever since that wretched article appeared in the *Sunday Times* about the children's theatre in Gloucester I have been inundated with letters about children, letters by children, books and plays and pamphlets about and for children, and requests to go and talk to children. People will not understand that because one writes about a thing one is not necessarily interested in it. I am a professional journalist, and it is my job to be equally good about steeplejacks or steeplechases. Actually I am interested in neither ; do you think I care what safety

appliances the jack uses or how many jockeys break their necks? I loathe heights and have never been to Aintrec. I am sure the new plans for reconstruction are going to revolutionise the world. I am certain that cures for serious diseases are enormously important. I am convinced that the newly invented Botibol for Babies, compounded of fresh ducks' eggs and Lithia water, will produce a race of super-athletes. Alas, I don't care about these things. I care only about my work and my books, and about the things with which my work and my books are concerned. And of these I can assure you that mothercraft is not one. No doubt it is a capital hobby for people living in the country whose only alternative is to gaze out of window at the flat, wet fields.

Let me end this somewhat frigid letter on a warmer note. I read in an American magazine recently that some one in her New York show said to B. Lillie, "Say, are you Lady Peel when you ain't aetin'?" The reporter went on: "B. drew herself up and said with the chilling hauteur characteristic of an English aristocrat: 'You goddam know I am, so what?'"

And now you goddam know I'm not going to write that goddam article.

Yours faithfully,  
JAMES AGATE

Oct. 9 Came down to Brighton at ever-kind Charles Smith's Monday. invitation, Norman Newman having ordered me a few days' holiday after a week of shocking plays. They tell me that when *Jenny Jones*, the Hippodrome fiasco for which I predict a long run, was first produced down here Baliol Holloway, that first-class Shakespearean actor, playing a mad chemist, went down on all-fours and barked like a dog. I wonder whether he thought of Emil Jannings, in *The Blue Angel*, putting on a false nose and uttering that ghastly "Cock-a-doodle-do"?

Chose this place because there is really nowhere else to go, and in spite of the fact that the soft air invariably brings on a liver attack within twenty-four hours. Immediately on arrival motored twenty miles into the heart of the Sheila Kaye-Smith country to graee a soldiers' concert in which piano-accordions—an instrument that I loathe—figured plentifully. On Saturday afternoon attended a concert in the Dome—the National Symphony Orchestra with Sidney Beer, who seems to like

music as well as conducting it. *Leonora* Overture No. 3, Grieg Piano Concerto, Venusberg music, Siegfried's Trauermarsch, Ravel's *Daphnis and Chloë* No. 2. Some two thousand people present, who, I am convinced, went to the concert because the pieces were pieces they wanted to hear. According to William Glock in yesterday's *Observer*, this is all wrong. "It is essential to remember that without a daring and educated choice of works, financial backing and packed houses become meaningless for English music." But how much would performances of Mippin's Sonata for Harp and Cor Anglais or Tippin's Elegy for Trombones mean for English music if they could obtain no backing and nobody went to hear them?

Charles is kindness itself and the soul of understanding. Thus when on Saturday I flatly refused to go to see the Ballet Something-or-other dance the Versailles Treaty he didn't insist, but let me go to an appalling little music-hall instead. And then he protects me. When callers arrived for aperitifs yesterday with the *Sunday Times* under their arms Charles at once stopped them from asking what I *really* thought of *Jenny Jones*. Liver attack was some twenty-four hours behind time. Spent the morning gazing out of Charles's high windows over what Osbert Sitwell calls the "pale-blue imbecility" of the sea. In the afternoon made myself read, for review purposes, a story about a young woman who, besides being a sleepwalker and a dead shot with a rifle, was suspected of having murdered three husbands, leaving them dead in rooms locked and barricaded. In the end the villain turned out to be the family doctor, who, after committing a lot more crimes of the same kind, escaped out of the window, which he fastened behind him by means of a drawing-pin! The author has been praised by J. B. Priestley, Dorothy Sayers, and Agatha Christie, in spite of which I shall continue to hold that bosh is bosh.

Having for years described the films as a form of escapism, I had the notion to-night of trying one of them as a means of escape from Brighton. Chose *The Great Waltz*, partly because I missed it in town, and partly because not even Hollywood can spoil Strauss's music. Discovered a woman who could sing louder, oftener, more persistently and piercingly than Jeanette MacDonald at her most shrill and indefatigable. Perhaps I don't believe that at twenty the young Strauss would call the future

Emperor a "stuffed shirt." Or that at seventy he looked exactly like Mr Chips. But Duvivier's direction is excellent, and I never tire of the waltzes. In the evening to a dreadful little play with Martin Walker and Veronica Rose, whom I took to supper at the Pavilion.

*Oct. 10* At last the week-end is over. I miss my letters, *Tuesday*. the absurd fan-mail, *The Times*—Charles takes the *Telegraph*—the constantly ringing telephone, the messenger boys calling for copy, the housekeeper's well-meant, wintry good-morning, Leo's catarrh, the clatter of the buses, the chatter of the club bores, the Café Royal's friendly waiters, Michael Shepley's pink smile, Bertie van Thal's docility, and George Mathew's whimsical tolerance of me in all moods from the monstrous to the petty. To my great delight I hear that Norman Newman has been laid up all week-end. It serves him right. He should have ordered himself to Brighton instead of me!

*Oct. 11* Extract from a letter :  
*Wednesday.*

I am over fifty, I love jazz (now called "swing"), have always loved it, make it my study, and after many years consider I can claim to know the beginnings of it. As I probably know as much about it as any man alive at present, that means I still consider it as in its infancy. In my various works on it, I attempt to analyse it and try to explain its spirituality. Speaking of spirituality, far from being a materialist, I am a spiritualist of over a quarter of a century's standing, and one of the things I look forward to, in the after-life, is the mental contemplation of the purest forms of jazz, such ineffable forms as our primitive methods of presentation and our stunted minds here below cannot grasp.

*Oct. 12* Letter from "Curly" (see *Ego 6*) :  
*Thursday.*

1608621 *Sgt. Bowdery, J. C.*  
841/116 *H.A.A. Battery, R.A.*  
*B.L.A.*

7 Oct. '44

DEAR JIMMIE,

I am now in Belgium—if you're interested. I think you

may not be, because I have had no word from you since setting a rather damp foot on foreign soil seven weeks ago. And have I travelled! It has been a mad, frightening, exciting period. I have been witness to the direst poverty and nauseating opulence. I have gone to bed hungry, yet heady with champagne. I have had the loveliness of cathedrals bludgeoned from my mind as my eyes look twice at machine-mauled youth with its blood still red. I have dined with millionaires and peasants. I have shivered on a prince's bed: my covering one blanket! And once, in a hovel, a naked, pregnant woman lay down beside me.

I have made more friends than I ever did in England, and, apparently, some enemies. In one district where I stayed two days I was, quite obviously, a sniper's special target.

Now we are resting a bit, and life is good. We are treated as befits liberators! Huge black grapes and walnuts and luscious pears and peaches are all the poor people have to give, and they give freely. The rich—and I distrust them—salute you with invitations to the opera and then dinner in their palatial homes. Chicken or pork—and you know the poor have forgotten the taste of meat. Thirty-year-old burgundy and fine old cognac. And yet, for the lack of a few thousand francs—the price of a forged permit through the Black Market—families have seen their sons and fathers and daughters dragged off to Germany, their fate still unknown.

How, one ponders, was it possible to remain prosperous under the Nazi régime and yet be patriotic? Butter, rice, sardines—all cost impossible prices in Belgium and must be purchased through the Black Market. Yet, in a store window, there is a bed-quilt displayed. It is made from priceless silver fox fur, and pinned to it is a "Sold" notice.

Cafés, ablaze with interior Neon, are crowded. Orchestras play unceasingly. "The Siegfried Line" and "Tipperary." Champagne is cheap, and coffee costs four shillings a glass. And down the side-streets the brothels are busy giving satisfaction. You can see an improper exhibition for five shillings or a packet of English cigarettes!

It's gay, mad, and brittle.

And the front is not so very far off. Bitter fighting there is. The war, it seems, will continue throughout the winter. And to-morrow we'll be going back to it: back to days which are alive with death and to nights which give no sleep. But that is to-morrow. Now it is to-day. Millionaires grow fat and young men die. The leaves are falling and the days grow cold. Winter of war.

But one day there will be peace. I hope we're ready for it. Write if you have time. Sometimes I see a three-day-old *Express*—once I was lucky enough to get one containing your article. So I know that up to 30 September you were well: only thus.

Sincerely,  
CURLY

*Oct. 15* I am not altogether surprised at the story of the *Sunday*. Aberdeen crematorium and the 1044 coffin lids which were afterwards converted into tea-trays, radio cabinets, and rabbit-hutches. An Aberdonian to whom I mentioned this to-night said, "The Scot may not have the advertising genius of the Jew, but he can pull off a pretty thing or two on the quiet."

Nor am I particularly surprised at the story of the thousand tons of coal which have been blazing away on a canal wharf in Staffordshire for the past eight weeks. I read in my *Express*:

Nobody to-night could explain the eight-week delay. But these assurances were given:

*By a Fuel Ministry senior officer*: "We are making inquiries. You may take it that if the fire had been reported to us it would have been dealt with."

*By the Canal Wharf Colliery Company*: "We reported the outbreak eight weeks ago. We followed the usual procedure, but we don't know which Government department is responsible. Inspectors came down, but nothing happened."

*By the local Fuel Overseer*: "I understand the report was made to Birmingham. If it had come to me I would have dealt with the matter at once."

*By the N.I.S. column officer*: "The Ministry of Works is sending an excavator to-morrow to remove the burning section. Firemen will be there with hoses."

*And by a local miner, aged 67*: "A few men with shovels could have done the job, but it seemed to be nobody's business."

I repeat, I am not in the least surprised. One day during the last war, when I was shipping hay from Marseilles, it was reported to me that fifty tons, or some such amount, were wet and rotten and therefore dangerous cargo. In short, the captain of the boat refused to take it, and the bales were left on the

quay. I reported to the War Office in London that I could get seven francs per ten or a hundred kilos—I forget the rate—for it from a local dealer who could use it. The W.O. replied that hay bought by the British Government for fourteen francs was presumed worth fourteen francs, and must be sold at that price or not at all. Later, as the stuff worsened, I reported bids of five and two francs, and was in each case referred to the original memorandum. Finally I wrote to the W.O. to say that the Mayor of Marseilles was proposing to shovel the now putrid heaps into the sea, which would cost the A.S.C. a hundred francs, and would I kindly send the money for this and at the same time settle a bill for two hundred francs, the cost of the police guard? The memorandum came back marked: "Approved."

*Oct. 16* The moral of Maugham's *The Circle* is that if you *Monday*, steal a friend's wife who is an empty-headed, commonplace, vain, chattersome minx you will find yourself later on tied to a mindless, overdressed harridan who talks like Flora Finch and looks like Mrs Skewton. And I bethink me of Paula Tanqueray's "I hate paint and dye and those messes." (She didn't; she hated them only when they ceased to be effective.) Maugham's is an old story which Lottie Venne told so pathetically and to-night Yvonne Arnaud refused to tell at all. Her Lady Catherine at sixty had ten times the charm and fascination she could have had at twenty. Let all that vivacity, nonsensicality, and blazing fun loose in any drawing-room, and every little whicy-faced ninny present must have wilted still further at the thought that *that* is something to which she will never attain. Maugham says to his young man: Don't run away with this chit unless you are prepared to end up with an old fright like Lady Catherine. What the present production makes the lover say to the young wife is: Unless you promise to grow into an adorable, witty old thing like Lady C. I won't take you on.

*Oct. 17* Dreadful day. Worked all morning and rushed down *Tuesday*. to a publishers' luncheon in time for the speeches. Had to listen to some rambling stuff on advertising by a woman novelist who confessed to knowing nothing of the subject. Then why not shut up? When my turn came I made

some disconnected, angry remarks, grabbed my hat, and departed. Then to the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer private theatre, where, since I was late, I must sit on the floor for two hours looking at Lana Turner showing off that coiffure in something called *Marrudge is a Privut Affair*. Gosh, how sick I got of that canary-coloured quiff, bang, billow, pillow, or whatever it's called. Left, saying to myself

"With such hair, too. What's the use of all that gold  
Topped with hyacinths and paneakes? I feel chilly and grown old."

After which to some bloody thing at the theatre.

*Oct. 18* Went to-night to Mr G.'s fourth and most moving *Wednesday. Hamlet*. Beautiful production by George Rylands.

Leslie Banks very good as the King, and Milcs Malleson a superb Polonius. Hamlet is not a young man's part. Who wants or expects a stripling to hold forth on the life after death, the propriety of suicide, the nature of man, the exuberance or restraint of matrons, the actor's art, the Creator's "large discourse"? Mr G. has now reached the right age; he is at the height of his powers; and the conjunction is marvellously happy. When, fourteen years ago at the Old Vic, the curtain went up on the new Hamlet there was perhaps not very much there except infinite grace. Four years later, after the production at the New Theatre, I find that I wrote: "The impression gathered is that of a Hamlet who can fly into the most shattering of pets." Five years later (Lyceum): "One's impression of this brilliant performance does not outlast the moment of its brilliance. It is cometary. That's Hamlet, that was! And the sky is empty again." I was delighted to find to-night that our First Player has, at last, stopped all the gaps. He is now unchallengeably this generation's rightful tenant of this "monstrous Gothic castle of a poem." He has acquired an almost Irvingesque quality of pathos, and, in the passages after the play scene, an incisiveness, a raillery, a mordancy worthy of the Old Man. To-night he imposed on me all this play's questing feverishness; the middle act gave me ninety minutes of high excitement and assured virtuosity; I don't remember that Forbes-Robertson was more bedazzling in the "O, what a rogue and peasant slave" soliloquy. Indeed, I think there is no doubt

that this is, and is likely to remain, the best Hamlet of our time, and that is why I shall urge John to stick to the mantle of tragedy and leave lesser garments to others. For, like John Philip Kemble, he is not really a comedian. J. P. had the notion that by taking thought an actor can qualify himself for the lighter as for the more serious side of his art. This is rubbish. All the trying in the world would not have turned, say, Matthew Arnold into a dinner-table wit. It is the same with acting. Whenever I see John in a comic part I bethink me of Kemble, and Hazlitt's tale of his "unaccountable abstracted air, the contracted eyebrows, and suspended chin of a man about to sneeze." No, despite the Congreveian antics, I cannot see or hear the comedian in Mr G., who for comedy substitutes a wonderful line of something that is half superciliousness and half moral priggishness. He would be admirable as Sir Willoughby Patterne or Aubrey Tanqueray. If Dickens had cast his novels in the form of plays he would have made a magnificent Dombey, a superb Mr Littimer (always supposing he had not cast himself for Steerforth), and a devastatingly subtle Mr Mould. "How much consolation may I have diffused among my fellow-creatures by means of my four long-tailed prancers, never harnessed under ten pund ten!" As a comedian our First Player has no warmth, whereas as a tragedian he is all fire. He lives up to G. H. Lewes's dictum: the greatest artist is he who is greatest in the highest reaches of his art. And that is why I conjure him to stick to those rôles which entitle his critics to pronounce him a great actor. I shall make something of all this on Sunday.

*Oct. 19      Letter from an old and still unknown friend :  
Thursday.*

MISTER AYE-GATE, SIR,

Please don't be ill. Be anything else: drunk, lazy, cross, far away, on strike, but NOT ill. What is the use of people inventing things like penicillin and sulphonamide if you are not going to use them?

The nicest but one woman in this world died lately. You might have met her; she knew every one, Montgomery to A. P. Herbert. I liked her in the absolute and blind way the little French peasant in that silly film liked her "lady." I tried to remember what it was Shakespeare had said of that

kind of beauty, and at lunch-time one day went into Holborn Reference Library and said to the young woman in charge, " Could I see a copy of *The Tempest* for a minute, please ? " The pretty creature looked down her nose and said haughtily, " We don't take it." The quotation about Miranda doesn't really do, for Miss H. W. was like Caliban's music, she gave delight and hurt not. What made her seem finer, if anything could, was that I found her in a setting of so many women, most of them beautiful. But at goodness she was a genius, she didn't have to try.

There is nine o'clock. I must go and telephone the office that I am not coming. I am making myself a fur jacket and shall sew at that until it is time to go to the Greek church. I shall understand two words if they are spoken, " Papa " and " Theo," but I want to be with Greeks and that is the only way I know.

Letter from the Principal of the Royal Manchester College of Music :

Ducie Street  
Oxford Road  
Manchester 15  
October 14th 1944

DEAR MR AGATE,

As one who shares your nostalgia for the Manchester of forty years ago, and one who gets enormous pleasure from your writings, may I say how much I enjoyed your article in last night's *Manchester Evening News* ?

With regard to your note on the memorable evening when Beecham gave *Appalachia* and *Sea Drift* to an audience of two hundred—I was one of that fortunate gathering—I should like to add a postscript of a personal nature which may or may not interest you. Beecham's next appearance was at a Hallé concert, and for some inscrutable reason Sidebotham invited me to write the *M.G.* notice of this concert. It was my first, and almost last, excursion into journalism, and I shall never forget the two or three hours of excruciating travail which preceded the delivery of the notice. Nor shall I ever forget the thrill of relief I experienced when Sidebotham, after reading it and stopping in the middle to remark, " We don't split our infinitives in this office, although personally I think we should," turned to me and said, " Well, Forbes, if you will allow me to say so, I think that is an excellent article." The notice was no doubt foolish, and probably unjust to Beecham—he doesn't know to this day that I wrote it—but

I have always felt a certain amount of pride that I was one of the few voices in the wilderness crying out that Delius was a genius.

Many years afterwards—in 1915 or 1916, I think—I had the joy of giving the first performance at a Hallé concert (with Beecham) of the Piano Concerto, and also the first public performance—in fact, the first performance of any sort, for the composer heard it for the first time in Beecham's house in Hobart Place, when, clad in pyjamas and dressing-gown, he insisted on my reading the piano part of his first Violin and Piano Sonata from MS. in the small hours of the morning. Those occasions began an acquaintance, and I think I may say a friendship, which lasted until a few months before his death, when I visited him for the last time at his home in Grez-sur-Loing.

I possess the original manuscript of the Violin Sonata, and also a good many letters from Delius. In one of the latter he makes an interesting confession of faith. Speaking of Scriabin he says : “ I know scarcely anything of Scriabin—a few piano pieces very much influenced by Chopin and a few quite modern piano pieces, which in my opinion are quite experimental. I see no relation between the first works of S. and these pieces. I take little interest in experimental art of any kind. Music, especially, is only the means of expression of a nature human, poetic, original, commonplace, or rare as the case may be. The moment the intellect predominates in the purely experimental, like Erik Satie, Strauss (in part), Schönberg and Stravinsky (in part), it leaves me cold, unmoved, and only partly interested.”

I hope this little ebullition has not bored you, but I was moved to it by your recollections of the great days of Manchester.

.Yours sincerely,  
R. J. FORBES

*Oct. 20*      Lunched at the Ivy with Wally Crisham, Dorothy Friday.      Dickson, B. Lillie, Hermione Baddeley, who is to play one of the Ugly Sisters in this year's pantomime, and Hermione Gingold, who insists on playing Prince Charming. Did some of my wittiest listening.

Many things are admirable *in their way*. Such things, for example, as the noises which, nightly between the hours of eleven and twelve, are vomited by the melancholy little box at my elbow. Millions, I feel sure, are comforted when they hear,

as I have just heard, a cloying contralto croon " Milkman, keep those bottles quiet." But I do not think a musical critic would be expected to pronounce about this. Comic strips are excellent, but they are not the concern of art critics. Literary critics are not asked to discuss Rhoda Dendron's twaddle. Why, then, should dramatic critics be asked to pronounce upon the equivalent of these things merely because it takes place in a theatre ? Imagine *Pride and Prejudice* shorn of Mr and Mrs Bennet, their daughter Elizabeth, Mr Collins, and Lady Catherine. Imagine that the whole book had been devoted to Lydia and Kitty, and how, in the absence of their parents, they invited the officers of the Meryton Militia to a party. Even so, one must believe that Jane would have made something of it, just as in *Mansfield Park* she made something of Sir Thomas Bertram's return from Antigua to the untimely interruption of those private theatricals. Was not E. V. Lucas once heard to say that Sir Thomas's unexpected entry was the third greatest event in the history of the world ? Alas, to-night's authors of *Daughter Jamie*, after two hours of which I fled, made nothing of the party thrown by the dreadful little Colburn brats to the American soldiers. As a film addict I have seen this story some ten or twelve times as the second feature in programmes in such localities as Paddington and Camden Town. Generally the plainest girl of the party turns out to be the possessor of a Voice. It is summer, the window is open, and a passer-by hears the Voice swinging Schubert's " Serenade." And who is that passer-by ? None other than the great singing-master, Professor Fiorituro. With the result that within three weeks the Voice has been re-trained and is performing *Tosca* or *Turandot* at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York. But *Daughter Jamie* wasn't as amusing as that. It was just nothing. I left the theatre murmuring

" Et, ô ces voix d'enfants chantant dans la coupole ! "

and wondering why the shrill cries of precocious bunny-huggers should be so much less enchanting. But perhaps I ought to have recognised that Verlaine is out of fashion, and that the proper thing to do was to relate this play to Rainbow Corner and the author of

Is you is, or is you ain't, ma Baby ?

After all, the end of playing, as an earlier dramatic critic remarked, was and is to show the age and body of the time his form and pressure. I suppose it is arguable that *Daughter Janie* does this.

*Oct. 21 Saturday.* Went again last night to *Richard III*. Olivier has heightened and deepened and widened his performance out of recognition ; it is now a masterpiece of *gouaillerie*, and the death scene is as tremendous as, judging from Hazlitt, I take Kean's to have been. Took Larry and Vivien Leigh to supper afterwards, when the Café Royal provided a banquet of roast partridges washed down with burgundy, which I can't drink, and champagne, which I find I still can. V. L. turns out to be as intelligent as she is pretty. Over and over again she said how much she preferred theatre to screen, and was backed up by Larry saying that film-acting is no job for an actor. He denied that Jock, who has arranged the text for the *Henry V* film, has painted the leaves of the trees yellow. "It's going to be a very green Agincourt."

*Oct. 23 Monday.* Promisingly bulky package from Joek. This turns out to contain a short note and a letter proper. The note informs me that he is laid up with a skin complaint, and that this can be cured only if he smears himself all over twice daily with something which makes him look "as black as Wolfit's Othello but not so funny." There is a P.S. :

I seem to remember your saying in your last something about "Jock regards Europe merely as a place for walking in." If that is for print (and I'm not too late) alter "walking" (which I certainly never said) to "a place for stravaging, serendipitating, eating, drinking, conversing, picture-gazing, and drabbing in." I mean that "Stravaging" is Scots for "rushing about frenziedly" (as I did in Paris for four days and nights). "Serendipitating"—my favourite occupation of all—you once charmingly defined as "fooling around in a leisurely and cultured manner." One stravages in Paris and Copenhagen and Hamburg ; one serendipitates in the Netherlands.

And then follows the letter proper :

E 5 Ward  
 R.N. Hospital  
 Haslar  
 Hants

22nd October, 1944

DEAR JAMIE,

Since I am laid up now with acute blood-poisoning, here is a sheaf of quotations from the things I have found to read. The result should be on the lines of a communication from your unforgettable Brother Edward.

(1) "I took up the candlesticks and went before them, steps that I would give my hand to recall ; but a coward is a slave at the best ; and even as I went, my teeth smote each other in my mouth. It was as he had said : there was no breath stirring ; *a windless stricture of frost had bound the air* ; and as we went forth in the shine of the candles, the blackness was like a roof over our heads."

(2) "The universe is but an atom before the vastness of one's self ! "

(3) "'Does it occur to you,' he went on, "that at this moment we are walking through the midst of seven million distinct and separate individuals, each with distinct and separate lives and all completely indifferent to our existence ? Seven million people, each one of whom thinks himself quite as important as each of us does. Millions of them are now sleeping in an empested atmosphere. Hundreds of thousands of couples are at this moment engaged in mutually caressing one another in a manner too hideous to be thought of, but in no way different from the manner in which each of us performs delightfully, passionately, and beautifully, his similar work of love. Thousands of women are now in the throes of parturition, and of both sexes thousands are dying of the most diverse and appalling diseases, or simply because they have lived too long. Thousands are drunk, thousands have over-eaten, thousands have not had enough to eat. And they are all alive, all unique and separate and sensitive, like you and me. It's a horrible thought.' "

(4) "I wish I were anything rather than an actor—*except a critic* ; let me be unhappy rather than vile ! "

(5) "Dear Mr X,—My first impulse was not to answer your letter ; but silence might seem to indicate a resentment which I am far from feeling.

"I am sorry we differ as to the quality of your imagination. Of course you may very likely be right and I wrong. In that

case you will go down to posterity as a very great actor, instead of what I think you—an able and very valuable artist. Need I add that nothing would please me more than to be converted to your view? You actors perhaps do not realise what a delight it would be to a critic to hail a new Kean or Salvini—if only he could.

“ Of course you know the text of Shakespeare better than I do, since it is your business to study and repeat it. Whether you can feel its beauties better than I, and can perfectly convey what you feel, is a different question.

“ There never was a critic worth his salt, my dear Mr X, who was not ‘ proverbial for his unfairness.’ If I continue to write criticism, and you continue to do good work as an actor and manager, I am not without hope that you may one day view my imperfections with a more tolerant eye.

“ Yours truly ——”

(6) “ *Worcester, May 13th.* Arrived about five; and, after looking at my rooms, proceeded to the theatre; could not gain admission, and had to wait about a quarter of an hour in a public-house for the arrival of the housekeeper. Unpacked and undressed; though the rain poured down, the house was very good, and I acted Virginius very well, *and without any anger at all.* It was very decently done; only Dentatus had put a surplice over his street clothes and put part of a sheep’s fleece on his chin for a beard. Mr Bennett paid me; and I came to the Star, where I read the paper.”

(7) “ To tell the whole story of a life the autobiographer must devise some means by which the two levels of existence can be recorded—the rapid passage of events and actions; the slow opening up of single and solemn moments of concentrated emotion. It is the fascination of De Quincey’s pages that the two levels are beautifully, if unequally, combined. For page after page we are in company with a cultivated gentleman who describes with charm and eloquence what he has seen and known—the stage-coaches, the Irish rebellion, the appearance and conversation of George the Third. Then suddenly the smooth narrative parts asunder, arch opens beyond arch, the vision of something for ever flying, for ever escaping, is revealed, and time stands still.”

(8) “ *June 19th.* Saw Malibran in *Fidelio*; the dulness of the opera was really wearisome; it was, with the exception of this gifted creature’s performance, miserably done; and even she was not in her own element—the part seemed a weight upon her that she energetically but vainly struggled with. The scene at the end of the second act was superior

to Schröder-Devrient's, but in all besides she was inferior—straining at effect, melodramatic, elaborate, but not abandoned ; her resolution was strong, but her identity never seemed for a moment lost. Her costume was admirable—will our actors never learn ?—Never. I went into her room after the opera—there were several persons, Mr Cooper among them. She saluted me most affectionately, and, perhaps, to her I was what she was to me—a memorial of years of careless, joyous hope and excitement ; she said I was not altered ; I could not say what I did not think of her. I could have loved—one almost did love her, and I believe she was not indifferent to me. It often occurs to me on such recollections : how would my destiny have been altered ! I should possibly have been an *ambitieux*—should I have been happier ?—should I have had my Nina, my Willie, and little Catherine ? Left Malibran with a very great depression of spirits."

(9) "Like a general he surveyed the seasons and took steps to make his own little camp safe with coal and wood and beef and beer against the enemy. His day thus had to accommodate a jumble of incongruous occupations. There is religion to be served and the pig to be killed ; the sick to be visited and dinner to be eaten ; the dead to be buried and beer to be brewed ; Convocation to be attended and the cow to be bolused. Life and death, mortality and immortality, jostle in his pages and make a good mixed marriage of it : . . . found the old gentleman almost at his last gasp. Totally senseless with rattlings in his Throat. Dinner to-day boiled beef and Rabbit roasted.' All is as it should be ; life is like that."

(10) "Day came upon the inland mountain-tops, and the fowls began to cry, and the smoke of homesteads to arise in the brown bosom of the moors, before I turned my face homeward, and went down the path to where the roof of Durrisdeer shone in the morning by the sea."

(1) Stevenson's *The Master of Ballantrae*. I wonder if Filson Young had this at the back of his mind when he coined that phrase of his we like so much.

(2) Surely a possible motto for any of your *Ego's* ? It is an exclamation of the actor Macready in his Diary.

(3) A London night-thought of one of the characters in Aldous Huxley's *Antic Hay*, though the book as a whole reads to-day as preposterously clever and preposterously dated. It is 1928.

(4) Macready again. (I have found here a big two-volume edition, issued in 1912, and much fuller than the old single volume we know. I shall steal them when we go—and leave my gas-mask in their place!)

(5) A model letter by William Archer to an actor unspecified. It is dated 1907, and is printed in Archer's biography by his brother, Lt.-Col. Charles Archer. This is a delicious book (which nobody read) on the lines of Elizabeth Robins's correspondence with Henry James (which nobody read either). I do not have to point out to *you* what an immensely neat admixture of honey, dignity, and sarcasm this letter is.

(6) Macready in 1885 and at the age of 40. I think he was far nearer a great actor than you do, but there is something irresistibly lugubrious-comic about him at times. And no one—no one dead, that is!—could make a better diary-entry than this one.

(7) This, sir, is an example of the work of one whom I, soberly and seriously, consider the best literary critic of this century—and most certainly one of the immortals in that genre. It is by Virginia Woolf.

(8) Macready in 1885 again. Did *you* know that there had been a something between him and our Malibran? He goes out into the night after the entry, as it were, quite irresistibly like Augustus Moddle splitting his heart for Miss Pecksniff.

(9) Virginia Woolf again, on Parson Woodforde and his Diary.

(10) Stevenson again, and *The Master of Ballantrae*, with its marvellous word-sense of Scottish weather.

That's all for now.

Yours aye,  
Jock

I have replied :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*  
*Centenary of Sarah Bernhardt*

DEAR JOCK,

How dreadful! No, I don't mean that. There's no dread about it. But what an abject, disgusting, humiliating, irritating, petty condition to be in! Am most sympathetic, and that's why you're getting this letter writ by my own fair hand. Yes, yours is the kind of letter Edward loved to write, and I loved to get. "But it's all quotations!" You know the parrot-cry. Of course it is, but think—that is what I say to the parrots—of the mind that picked them out. Here are some counter-notes.

(1) Wasn't Filson's phrase "The air, strict with frost"? And didn't it occur in an essay on visiting the Alhambra—or do I mean the Escorial—on a winter's morning?

(2) This was affixed to the present *Ego* some six months ago!! Leo will certify that this is not an afterthought.

(3) I agree about A. H. He is an immensely, disturbingly clever writer for whose books I have no use whatever.

(7) Of course V. W. is a first-rate critic—and I don't mean good second-rate. It's her meandering novels that I find unreadable. But then I could never read Montagu's.

(9) Lovely!

(10) Ditto.

Thank you, Jock, for an exquisite something which is more than posy and less than bouquet. Life goes on here pretty much as usual. Had a field-day yesterday in which I wrote one article on "Films I Want to See" for a Bristol paper (when Leo had finished it had become "Films I Don't Want to See"), a second article on Daudet's *L'Arlesienne* for the *Radio Times*, and sketched out a third on pantomime for the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office!

You will have noted the date on this letter. *The Times* had not a word, and even the *M.G.* kept mum. My suggestion that I should be allowed three minutes on the air to-night was coldly received. It appears they had broadcast something or other by somebody or other on some foreign service or other two days ago. I pointed out that the idea was to tell *home listeners* something—three minutes isn't much—about Sarah and let our French allies get the compliment on the rebound. They said the notion was excellent and rang off. Overhearing my curses not loud but deep, somebody leaned across from a neighbouring table at the Café to-night and said, "You seem to think that the B.B.C. has a directing mind. It hasn't. It's a rabble of petty officials. I work there, and I know." My celebrations, therefore, have been wholly private. I rang up May one minute after midnight and drank a toast with her. And that was all.

The post has just brought Clement Scott's *Some Notable Hamlets*, which somebody sends me as a present. "The last words [in Tree's 1892 revival] spoken were those of Horatio: 'Good night, sweet prince, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!' At this moment an angelic choir is heard to faintly echo Horatio's words, 'Good night, sweet prince,' which visibly affected the special audience assembled last

night." From which it would appear that it was not Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer who started this bloody nonsense. Who did ? My bet is Wagner : end of Venusberg music.

Ever,  
JAMIE

*Oct. 24* Supper to-night at the C. R. with Frank Singleton.  
*Tuesday.* I hope it wasn't the sight of me which reminded him of somebody's "Epitaph on a Hat, a Beard, and a Cloak" :

"A loss to art,"  
 Said friends less true than loyal ;  
 "A loss," said others,  
 "To the Café Royal."

But then Frank himself is a very good epigrammatist. I remember his "Bus Conductor" :

Zip-fastener-like the young man's eyes  
 Run up and down the women's thighs ;  
 Frowning he takes their proffered fares,  
 And smiling beds them unawares.

Sup with Frank, and the eighteenth century comes to life again. As in this frisk, which I think is probably his best. It is called "Lady Booby and the Telephone" :

My footman's moll is Button A,  
 He 'phones her ev'ry other day,  
 Inserts his coin and when he's through  
 Vows that to her he still is true.

Alternate days he rings up me,  
 The scurvy fellow's Button B,  
 From whom he's learned, with servile knack,  
 "Press me, and get your money back."

I remember helping Frank to polish this one morning—he scribbling in the study, I getting dressed all over the place, lines and rhymes flying through the door. It was like Cormicille sitting upstairs in the house of which his brother occupied the ground floor. Pierre, immersed in some interminable tragedy, would lift a trap in the boards, and the house would resound with the cry : "Thomas—il me faut une rime pour 'sphinx' ! "

*Oct. 26* Major R. Crisp, D.S.O., M.C., in the *Daily Express*,  
*Thursday.* after paying a tribute to the older German soldiers, writes of the children now being taken prisoner :

Before such courage you stand in awe and, you can't help

it, in admiration. Then you see the face of this child, and you realise icily that here is a naked, mad killer.

See them even back in the prison cages, with the lust of battle gone from them. There is nothing that is decent, or gentle, or humble to be read in them. Everything that is beastly and lustful and cruel.

This is a generation of men trained deliberately in barbarity, trained to execute the awful orders of a madman. Not a clean thought has ever touched them.

They, too, are made in the image of God? They know no god but their Fuehrer, no commandment but "Thou shalt kill." The story is true of the wounded Nazi prisoner in a British hospital who refused to have the blood transfusion that could have saved his life because it was not German blood.

Every German born since 1920 is under this Satanic spell. The younger they are, the more fiercely impregnated are they with its evil poison. Every child born under the Hitler régime is a lost child. It is a lost generation. What are we to do with them?

The answer is perfectly simple: give them each a year's subscription to the *New Statesman*!

*Oct. 27* Maugham's *The Breadwinner*, revived to-night at the *Friday Arts*, is a bad play and enormous fun. It is a bad play because it ends with the second act, and the rest can only be nonsense; though, being Maugham, it is still lively nonsense. And even the first two acts are vitiated for the following reason. Over and over again it is insisted that the stockbroker (the "breadwinner") is a man without charm or vestige of a sense of humour, a man completely summed up in the word "stuffy." Then why not get a stuffy actor or even an actor who can simulate stuffiness? Because, as Maugham well knew, no West End audience can be assembled for a play whose leading man hasn't oodles of charm and lashings of wit. I find that when Ronald Squire created the part in 1930 I wrote in the *S.T.*:

There should have been some spark of malignancy, of deep-seated selfishness, of long-meditated revenge in this man supposed capable of playing Gauguin's trick; the part demanded a wryer mouth, more sardonic wrinkles, and deeper layers of unsuspected strength of character.

This applies with equal force to Denys Blakelock, a witty actor of more elegances of mind and manner than any six light comedians of the commercial stage permit themselves to-day. His performance to-night could be described as a riot, except that a better word would be ripple.

*Oct. 28*      Another letter from my unknown friend :  
*Saturday.*

25.10.44

MISTER AYE-GATE, SIR,

Gor blimey, Guv'nor, you almost persuade me to go and see Mr Gielgud gyrate. That wasn't so good a picce of writing as Mr Wolfit being in the Wash up to his neck. Have half a suspicion that you have been overpowered by mass cmotion at the Haymarket, and a very natural liking for any lad who tries and tries at Hamlet. But Mr Wolfit satisfics me, perhaps because I prefer, let us say, roast beef to ice cream.

So you don't approve of "Yankin'" ? Tut, tut ! A one-man Watch Committee ? To know how adorable Yanks are you should be a young woman very conscious that there are two million too many of you. It is so easy to charm them. And can't they charm back ! Oh boy, oh boy ! They are so modest, some so very shy, so unable to be bitter, so scrupulously honest, so well-mannered, and so very complimentary. I know one who is an El Greco and who says, "I could love you to death, honey." If I thought I would make a good wife I would risk it. If I thought he would be killed—and his job is very dangerous—I would marry him to-morrow. Of course I can't say if other Yanks are as lovable as those I've come across. I think young London girls are pretty hard-headed, and, Yanks being so upright and managable (unlike ye British), must they be in the dire peril you suppose ?

I remember saying to myself when I heard Gillie Potter over the wireless, "Gosh, the Agate accent !" To-day I saw a picture of him. He looks like you, too. Are you cousins ?

Isn't 'flu tiring !

Yours trooly—

*Oct. 30*      Letter to Neville Cardus :  
*Monday.*

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C. 2*

*October 30th, 1944*

DEAR CARDUS,

*Re your Ten Composers.* Have corrected your spelling.

Also your Italian, German, French, and occasionally your English. Have put your French accents right. Have emended your quotations from Goethe, Wagner, and Shakespeare. Titivated your titles. In places made the clumsy felicitous. Changed "Debussyards" into "Debussyites." (Come and play in my Debussyard!) Verified your keys. Rationalised your punctuation. In Lear's "Pray you, undo this button," have inserted the rightful comma and deleted the interrogation mark. Have elected for "Newman" *tout court*, as I can't make out whether it's the Cardinal or the musical critic of the *Sunday Times* who "often quotes Coleridge with affection and point." In short, I have put this entrancing book right in all matters of fact and left only its errors of taste and judgment!

Now, my dear boy, this has cost me some seventy-two hours of work which, at the rate of sixpence an hour, will amount in a few years' time to a bottle of champagne. This I shall put on ice the moment you set foot on board. For I presume that you are not going to spend the rest of your days in the land of kangaroos and cricketers.

Ever,

JAMES AGATE

P.S. It beats me how, in the Australian bush, you can have produced a book so essentially accurate in all that matters.

Oct. 31 From George Richards:

Tuesday.

They are obviously going to have a devil of a job to find another Primate with a mind. Since, when it comes to choosing B.B.C. announcers, they do not always limit their choice to the human species (one of the most popular and best-known, for instance, being a giraffe—to say nothing of three or four donkeys), they might this time give serious consideration to several likely horses as candidates for Cantuar. On the other hand, a lobbyist in Church politics tells me, it may be a close thing between a very High Church cockatoo and a quite Low Church glow-worm, the latter a hater of all kinds of ecclesiastical pomp and circumstance yet withal one of the best minds in the Church to-day. A likely compromise candidate, however, is the well-known and respected leader of the Reformed Bisexual Methodist Church, Dr Maurice Rocket. Besides being a Mormon, a very popular preacher, an ex-Insufragate-Metropolitan-Patriarch of Camden Town, Dr Rocket is also an authority on cholera in

chickens and a connoisseur of medieval porridge. If called to the Palace the burden of his message to the post-war world is likely to be a belief in the supreme relativity of what he calls *Absolute Values*.

*Nov. 1*      "The day's diet of sights and sounds." Yes, but *Wednesday*. need it be such a jumble as mine is ? Take to-day. Gave a luncheon to the heads of Harrap's—oysters, *filet mignon*, *Veuve Clicquot*—and made final arrangements for *A Shorter Ego*. Saw two films, wrote notices of both of them. After which I attended to to-day's correspondence. This included :

#### 1. Letter from an old lady :

Your recollections of Victorian days interest me greatly. I lived for forty-five years under Queen Victoria and reached the age of eighty-nine last Saturday. I find some difference between your memories and mine. You mention a husband lighting his cigar after dinner before his wife ; this was unheard of in my time. Very few gentlemen smoked : usually only officers. The Prince Consort *never* desiled his lips with tobacco. Queen Victoria did not allow it in her houses, only in a distant room very rarely used. My father never permitted smoking : it was quite out of fashion. I had no relation who smoked. Even in these rude times I have noticed working men, if elderly, remove their pipes when passing ladies.

We, also, dined with our parents on Sundays and on great occasions : we could talk quietly, but our good dinners took up our attention. We had half a glass of wine at dessert : I chose port, for its *colour*. We dipped nuts or biscuits into it : almonds and raisins favourites: pineapples often. After dinner my father said grace : my mother said, "Amen, you can go, if you like." We never said "Dad" or "Mummy" : they would have been astonished. I am remembering our amusements, departed never to return : skipping-ropes, hoops in the garden, tops, battledore and shuttlecock : *La Grâce*, dolls : I love them now. *Teddy-bears*. Horrible !

I am used to brilliant society and very bright wits : the greatest loss of all. Men here speak only of golf and dogs : women talk only "kitchen" ; no conversation is possible. I am an invalid, suffering much, but full of fun and with a memory. . . .

## 2. Letter to Vivien Leigh :

Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2

November 1st, 1944

DEAR VIVIEN LEIGH,

NO. I will NOT come to see *Arms and the Man*. I have an invincible phobia about this play, and am not going to make myself ill for all four of your and Larry's *beaux yeux*, and the best supper in London afterwards. To get out of seeing and writing about the revival of *Too True to be Good* to-night I am taking my first week off the *Sunday Times* since the war. Or hoping to. I just won't have anything to do with anything of the old man later than *St Joan*. I want very little of this masterpiece either, and of the earlier plays only four acts of *The Doctor's Dilemma*, and the whole of *Androcles and the Lion*. *Caesar and Cleopatra*? When this is going on I shut my eyes and mentally recite the other play. I shall look at you in the film, because not to do so would be impossible. But I shall not listen to you.

Please don't misunderstand me. I do not deny Shaw's immense genius, but I can't and won't stand it in the theatre because I don't think that genius is dramatic. I am essentially a romantic, and have no use for plays based on a theme of "Arma virumque dubunko."

It's no good arguing with me, since in this matter I am, and intend to remain, a brick wall.

Your devoted  
JAMES AGATE

## 3. Letter from Sergeant Hedley, at the War Office :

DEAR SIR,

On page 26 of your *Ego 6* you mention Mr Leo Pavia's having shown a young pianist how to play certain passages in Chopin's Barcarolle according to the "Chopin-Fontana-Leschetizky" tradition. One would like to know what this tradition was and how it arose, for I doubt whether many of the keenest Chopin enthusiasts have ever heard of it. For one thing, Fontana never heard Chopin play the Barcarolle. He and Chopin saw each other for the last time in 1841, and the Barcarolle was composed at Nohant during the glorious summer of 1845—the beautiful MS. belongs to M. Edouard Ganche, of Lyon. In 1841 Fontana went to Havana, where he married a rich Creole. He returned to Europe in 1852 (having just missed Chopin in London in '48) and went from one misfortune to another. Finally, in despair at going deaf, he blew out his brains, on New Year's Eve, 1869.

A Fontana tradition, if it exists, must be open to suspicion. Fontana had little respect for the integrity of Chopin's music. Look at the treatment of the Posthumous Works!—wholesale alterations of notes and rhythms, e.g., Waltz Op. 69 No. 1. Or he would take a couple of sheets, add a connecting bar, and call the result a Mazurka. He caused the first English edition of the Etudes to appear with *his* fingering and expression marks!

One of his merits is that he preserved the letters which Chopin wrote to him (I have a number of the originals, but one cannot publish a literal translation of some passages owing to what has been gracefully called Chopin's "intempérance de plume allant jusqu'à la dernière grossièreté.")

The letters—samples of which are enclosed—are, of course, in Polish. Which explains how Frédéric could write them under George Sand's august nose—indeed, she sometimes added a postscript in chaste French. Much of the stuff written about Chopin—"the dreamy Pole" and so forth—is nonsense. "Il était pur comme une larme!" wrote one of his female guardian angels. Nothing tearful about "Let the bloody little glove-man wait for his money." But then the paradox of the artist is something which the generality of people can't understand, and wouldn't if they could.

Nov. 2            Letter from Jock :  
Thursday.

E5 Ward  
R.N. Hospital  
Haslar  
Hants

81st October, 1944

DEAR JAMIE,

This can, in present circumstances, be only an incoherent scribble. I am furious at not knowing about Sarah's centenary! I could at the very least have had a par. about her in the *M.G.* My vexation at your not telling me a week earlier is as nothing to my self-impeaching wrath at not knowing anyhow—I who remembered in good time (and let you know of) the semi-centenary of Paula Tanqueray!

The fragment you sent me of May's book is quite exquisite—but maddening again, like a thimbleful of Château Léoville-Poyferré 1919 with no sign whatever of the bottle. (*Will Cape do it?* Tell me at once.)

A large part of the impetuosity and temper with which this note so far abounds may be traced directly to an acrimonious bout I have just had with the S.B.A. in charge of the ward for the afternoon. It astonished everybody—I am considered a model patient here. It was à propos of wireless. He wanted a reproduction of last Saturday's football match on the Forces programme, whereas I wanted Berlioz's "Chasse Royale et Orage," from *Les Troyens*, which is on the Home programme. May I add that the "Chasse Royale et Orage" is now playing—even if I have to be scalded, tonsured, and painted gamboge this evening to pay for it !

Why do I not hear from you about your supper with my dear, dear Mrs Olivier and that Crookback husband of hers ? I've heard only a "pig's whisper"—merely that it happened. Perhaps you were shy and therefore talked too much, and therefore formed either no impression at all or else a wrong one. She is a Berliozian little beauty—or rather (in view of my subsequent illustration) a Schumannnesque one. Do you remember what happened when Wagner met Schumann ? Their accounts were published long afterwards in widely different places, and they are funny juxtaposed :

#### WAGNER ON SCHUMANN

"Schumann is a highly gifted musician but an impossible man. When I returned from Paris I went to see Schumann ; I told him all about my Parisian experiences, spoke of the state of music in France, then of that of Germany, spoke of literature and politics, but he remained as good as dumb for nearly an hour. Now, one cannot go on talking quite alone. An impossible person ! "

The thing that is more than a posy and less than a bouquet is a chaplet.

The title-page and new Preface for the re-issued *Gemel* are unexceptionable, on the whole. I have read the Preface before, you know, at your flat. You are utterly right not to let anybody reprint your early essays alongside *Brief Chronicles*, *Red Letter Nights*, and *Immoment Toys*. Mozart

#### SCHUMANN ON WAGNER

"I have seldom met him, but he is a man of education ; he talks, however, unceasingly, and that one cannot endure for very long together."

did not tinker up some divertimenti for flute and harp in between the great E flat, G minor, and C major symphonies. Or if he did, that galumphing pundit, Herr Köchel, had the sense to take no notice and pretend he hadn't !

I improve, and get up two hours a day, and no longer need the Ivy's shrieks of sympathy. In fact, the Ivy may be not uninterested to know that I have all along been given one fresh egg per day, and either chicken or sweetbreads (or at the worst, fish) for lunch. The company, on the other hand, is just a shade removed from the Ivy's.

Ever,  
Jock

P.S. Good books for review—maybe you've already done them—are Gerald Kersh's *The Horrible Dummy*, short stories (Hinemann), and *The Lady in the Lake*, by Raymond Chandler (Hamish Hamilton)—the first nine-tenths of the latter brash, brilliant, brutal, and witty, and with character-drawing that makes Agatha Sayers (or whatever you call her) look like a pencil-sucking tot of three !

I have replied :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*  
November 2nd, 1944

DEAR JOCK,

The reason I didn't tell you about Sarah's centenary was that I myself didn't realise it until it happened.

May's *Madame Sarah* is a lovely little work. It has a section of the most exquisite scholarship devoted to the sounding or silencing of the 'e' in French verse. This section runs to fifty-four pages ; May, following my advice, has cut twenty-one of them. Which is clever, non-obstinate, and unagitating on her part. Cape, I *feel*, wants to publish it : the trouble here would seem to be a very full list plus the paper shortage. Home and van Thal have the paper and would, I *think*, take it for publication in the early spring. My difficulty at the moment is not to let May fall between these two stools.

I am a bit worried about something the other night. Just as I was rushing off to do a turn at the Stage Door Canteen a man came up to me in the lavatory of the Café Royal and said, "I have long wanted to meet you, Mr Agate. It's about your brother Edward's songs. I came across them in Sweden, where they are much appreciated, and have been wondering whether one could do anything about them." The awful thing is that I virtually told the man to go to hell ! Actually I put on my best smile and said, "Write me, telephone me,

lunch or sup with me, but for Heaven's sake don't buttonhole me now." I may have put the man off. Ought I to have cut my appointment? Perhaps not. I hope the fellow hasn't taken offence, and will ring me up. But what has Fate against Edward? Why does it insist that the work he prized most should be discussed in that place and at that time?

The Canteen affair is a No. 1 flop owing to my having to follow a little crooner, all lipstick and fingernails, and a radio comedian who tells radio stories about pansy policemen and so forth for twenty-one minutes. By this time the audience, which is packed so tight you can't squeeze in a sardine, has laughed itself out. Then Fay Compton, who is compèring, puts on the murderous smile she used in *The Little Foxes* and introduces me as a dramatic critic who writes mostly in French and German. This is not helpful. I begin jocularly by telling the doughboys that I do not propose to be nervous seeing that in the last few months I have made speeches in honour of Rachmaninoff, Lunt and Fontanne, Maisky, Max, the King of Greece, Sir Henry Wood, Field-Marshal Sir Bernard Montgomery and many more, explaining in each case who they are. (I sense that they have never heard of any of them.) Then tell them the story about the tiger and the donkey that made Maisky laugh. Not a smile. Next I read them the little American poem about the Old Mandarin:

The old mandarin loves quiet pleasures in later life ;  
 Sorting glass beads, painting on silk,  
 Trying to achieve a poison with a taste like plum-tart,  
 And, listening to the singing of the crickets,  
 He likes to sit on the grave of his first wife  
 And read an American novel, upside down. . . .

Still no smile. Next about the American furniture-store assistant who joined the Marines, came home on leave, and found that his wife had presented him with a baby :

Once upon a time  
 A young mother watched her man  
 Gazing down at their first-born.  
 Wonder, admiration, rapture,  
 Incredulity, all were reflected  
 In his face.  
 She stole up and said tenderly :  
 " Tell me your thoughts, honey ? "  
 He paused a second and said :  
 " The hell if I can see how  
 Anyone can sell that crib  
 For two-fifty  
 And make a profit."

Not a laugh. Girding my loins for a final assault, I give them my Grand Patriotic Finale from Stephen Leacock. About Lincoln asking whether, on the Potomac, Grant had been pushed backward or pushed forward, and how when, presently, Churchill telephones to Buckingham Palace to the same effect, only about the Rhine, H.M. will not have to ask whether in Eisenhower's case it is backward or forward. Not a hand! And I get the impression that nobody in the audience has ever heard of Grant, Lincoln, Churchill, King George, or their own Commander-in-Chief.

There is nothing much to tell you about your "dear, dear Mrs Olivier and her Crookback husband" except that I thought them both utterly charming. Indeed, I quite understand why you threw me over for them. I found her extremely intelligent and him ridiculously modest, though I don't hold with the modern "Off the stage we are ordinary people" nonsense. Actors are not ordinary people: Sarah and Irving weren't, and didn't pretend that they were. When V. and L. walked into the Café the other night not a head was turned. Why? Because she doesn't *sail*, and he won't *stalk*. Compare what I have so often told you about Sarah's entry into the Winter Garden at the Midland Hotel, Manchester, after the performance of *Pelléas et Mélisande*.

What about my new game of the best cast for *Hamlet* within living memory? Here is mine:

(1) Claudius	MALCOLM KEEN
(2) Hamlet	FORBES-ROBERTSON
(3) Polonius	GEORGE HOWE
(4) Horatio	GODFREY TEARLE
(5) Laertes	ERIC PORTMAN
(6) The Ghost	COURTENAY THORPE
(7) Player King	ESMÉ PERCY
(8) First Gravedigger	GEORGE WEIR
(9) Fortinbras	SHAYLE GARDNER
(10) Gertrude	ELLEN TERRY
(11) Ophelia	FAY COMPTON

(1) I prefer Keen to Frank Vosper, whose checks were too bloat.

(2) Irving is going too far back. My runner-up would be Mr G.

(3) But it's a very near thing between G. H. and Miles Malleson.

(4) This was ideal; Godfrey made H. the perfect Dobbin.



Photo Knipfer und Schramm, Heidelberg

*Erasmus Glohwurm as Lohengrin*



Photo Sydney W. Newbery

Dr Johnson  
by Inkpol  
(See p. 300)

(5) One of the most fiery performances I have ever seen.

(6) I have never known any other actor except C. T. begin to be a Ghost. Shaw writes about this : " And yet, until Mr Courtenay Thorpe divined it the other day, nobody seems to have had a glimpse of the reason why Shakespeare would not trust anyone else with it and played it himself." After which he goes on to talk about " the weird music of that long speech which should be the spectral wail of a soul's bitter wrong crying from one world to another in the extremity of its torment."

(7) I choose Esmé Percy because he is always and at all times a *performer*, and his most brilliant feats of acting have always been *performances*. Now the Player King must show at once that he is an actor. Hamlet, as you know, has already treated us to thirteen lines of *Aeneas' Tale to Dido*. And the Player King who follows Hamlet must obviously out-act him. Indeed, I've often thought that the P. K. should commit some of the faults which H. rebuked later on. Esmé would do this superbly, and my only hesitation in casting him for the P. K. is that owing to his training with Sarah he would make an admirable Player Queen.

(8) Weir has been in's grave these thirty years and more, and there is still nobody like him.

(9) Provided, of course, that Shayle wears the gold armour he used for Antony to Evelyn Laye's Cleopatra in the musical comedy of that name. Like Fortinbras, Antony appeared only at the end, and if my memory is correct, Shayle, on the first night, wearing the aforesaid armour, fell the full length of a marble staircase—soundlessly !

(10) A stroke of genius.

(11) In her own right, and not because Ellen couldn't double both parts.

There isn't much news. Long screed from Dicky Helme, quoting Napoleon's remark to Talma : " To turn tragedy into comedy you have only to sit down." Letter from Albert Throup to say that my little mare appears to be safely in foal. Present from G. B. Stern of a very beautiful walking-stick. Invitation to lunch from Clifford Bax, who says he has discovered a new portrait of Shakespeare.

Lastly, here is something for your next chaplet. It is from *Buskin' around Melodies*, by one Vic Filmer :

" Here comes the golden rule, if you can say it in two notes, don't use three ! This is a hard saying and goes against the

grain of most of you youngsters. It's true, cut out the flowery muck, get it simple and strong. I know full well you'll cite cases like Earl Hines on piano and Berny Bigout on gobstick who use vast bunches of notes, the one in fistfuls and the other in lightning skids all over the place. Well, let 'em. Such folk can't go wrong, they are natural born and developed geniuses, but the beginner must learn both mastery of his instrument and *mastery of his mind* before he can play safe with such tricks."

And that is all for the moment. Telephone me when you are coming up, and let me know what colour-scheme to expect.

Ever your

JAMIE

P.S. Bertie van Thal has just telephoned to say he will take May's book for publication early in the year.

P.P.S. Met Meum Stewart, as enchanting as ever. She was wearing a wonderful Réjanesque hat. It can have been given to few women to look in their first flush like an Epstein and at their meridian like a Gainsborough.

*Nov. 3* There is no reason that I can see why one should not *Friday*. have an Anglo-Patagonian Milk Supply Association. One would arrange this, I suppose, by assembling a number of Patagonians who should sell milk to an English clientèle. But the art world is different. Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* interleaved with *The Diary of a Nobody* would not make a good Anglo-Russian novel. Nor should I consider

This is a spray the Bird clung to,  
Would you rather swing on a star,  
Making it blossom with pleasure,  
Or carry moonbeams home in a jar?

a good Anglo-American lyric. To-night, in *Anglo-Russian Merry-go-round* at the Adelphi, we were treated to a mixture of *Chauve-Souris* and the sophisticated humours of the English low comedian. On the Russian side there was a great deal of heltering and skeltering, including a ballet in which Zeus turned himself into a bull for no ascertainable purpose since the rest was china-shop decorum. (A rogue in porcelain?) There was much commingling of Cossacks and gypsies, together with a great deal of Muscovite tra-la-la. It was impossible to discover what emotions were being mimed, sung, and danced, or what language was being used. But who cared? *Ce qui est trop*

*bête pour être chanté on le danse*, as Beaumarchais so nearly remarked. The English team consisted of George Lacy, with his pantomime burlesques of ballerina, opera-singer, and what-not. Also a Miss Pat Leonard, who, titivated to the last degree of modern ingenuity and resource, sighed for her childhood and the lanes down which she sped to school hand-in-hand with some grubby little horror. (This sort of thing leaves me cold. I infinitely prefer the one and only B. Lillie in her song about the chorus-girl who refused mink and asked only for a sunbonnet and a summer-house in which to wear it and think about lost innocence.) After which to-night's divette proceeded to tell us about the "Gloree of the Storce of a Starrec Night." And presently the evening, which had begun in the heart of the Steppes, finished up in Old Vienna, having looked in at Lillas Pastia's on the way.

Nov. 4        A few days ago I received this remarkable letter :  
*Saturday.*

*Penpol House  
 St Crantock  
 Newquay  
 Cornwall*

DEAR MR AGATE,

Where shall we look to-day to find a fearless champion of traditional style and quality in *new* work, especially poetry ? Is there an editor, publisher, producer, or actor-manager who would have accepted, say, *Richard III*, had the subject escaped Shakespeare, and had the said five-act drama been composed by a present-day poet of obscure name ?

Let me put it in a different, a more practical way. Suppose your genius had taken a poetic turn. Suppose that you, living in a country house in a remote corner of England, had composed a poetic drama around the life of Constantine, and knew it to be definitely superior on all counts to *Richard III*. Given your present knowledge of the theatre, what are the practical steps you would take, having in mind that each of the twenty characters in the play has to be "theatrically" created ?

I have no great hopes of this play's being accepted in any case : but I prefer to keep it in the drawer where it has lain for five years to sending it on a haphazard journey from one theatre to another, or one actor-manager to another. In the drawer it causes no long months or years of suspense, no

subsequent disappointment, while the danger of its getting into wrong hands, who might ruin it in production by poor casting, is eliminated. Even Shakespeare is maltreated these days. Witness many modern Shakespearean players, acting from the neck up, carrying their arms about like French loaves, and their thin legs, with their walloping feet, pinned loosely to buttocks narrow like Pinocchio's; and witness their leading ladies looking and sounding like Florence Nightingale back from the grave playing charades.

There are, I understand, persons and agencies who give professional advice to the young playwright, but we are considering here a play on a subject of the highest possible importance for which the author makes the confident claim that it is in every sense superior to *Richard III*—and which, incidentally, has already been read by a poetic dramatist (Mr T. S. Eliot), in his capacity as publisher, as far back as 1940, and without eliciting one complimentary remark.

Yet the author goes so far as to say that this play of his on the life of Constantine is a greater work of art, if less of an entertainment, than *Hamlet*, king of dramas, which does not possess one inspiring character. Even Horatio had not the manhood to save his self-stricken friend the Prince from personal destruction, as you and I would have done, or, at least, have gallantly attempted. Against the Constantine play no such charges can be brought, while half, at least, of its twenty characters are morally inspiring in their lives and deaths; and, on such a foundation, noble art is assured, for the playgoer shall emerge spiritually braced from the experience of witnessing it. *Hamlet*, on the other hand, being overloaded by spiritless characters of erudite tongue, fails in its great *moral* purpose, which, though sound, is so thoroughly obscured as to be wholly lost in a welter of melancholic tragedy in which the entire House of Denmark is sacrificed on the altar of self-worship.

In the matter of technical construction, this five-act poetic drama about Constantine, the Christian liberator, is, I make bold to say, unsurpassed. Each single act is a complete major drama in itself almost able to stand alone, and each embodies all the qualities of a full-blown drama carrying tragedy and humour—that is to say, the play's tragedy is balanced by five humorous episodes, one in each act, while the whole is so subtly linked together as to present a smoothly unfolding story.

Then all the old Elizabethan stage tricks have been carefully avoided, as these could only ruin the subject in hand, which is the political baptism of Christianity. There are,

therefore, no ghosts, witches' brews, gravediggers, coffin-followings, soliloquies with disinterred skulls, apothecaries' magic potions, midnight duels in tombs by lantern-light, dripping sacks containing severed heads, pounds of human flesh, etc., etc.

The limning of character, on the other hand, is as simply and lucidly done as in a Jane Austen novel, in spite of the difficulty of the medium. This is something in which Shakespeare is unmistakably lacking in the two of his works now running in the West End.

Finally, I do not withhold the MS. from you lest you should find it wanting in any of the audacious claims I have herein set down for it. On the contrary, I shall be most happy to let you see it, but only at your own expressed desire. I do not hesitate to state that all I have claimed for it, and more, would become immediately apparent in a well-cast and well-managed production. If you are without the time, however, I shall fully understand.

I am, sir, ever your admiring well-wisher,

ALEXANDER HERVEY

Yesterday, in reply to my urgent petition, the play entitled *The Emperor Constantine* arrived. Am now faced with the job of telling the author that, on the whole, I prefer Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Or even Ibsen's *Emperor and Galilean*. Shall soften the blow by telling him that, subconsciously, he derives from Webster, not to mention Otway. That I find a touch of Bosola in

What is this animated mud, this Man ;  
 This restless speck of jelly ; pot of blood,  
 And marrow bone ; this undivagant fish ;  
 Unbroken meat ; this ambulating brute ?  
 A pair of eyes, of ears, a sniffing snout ;  
 A slimy gullet, ever unpeased,  
 That craves dead vegetation, and dead flesh ;  
 A narrow, winding, gaseous, sewage-tract ;  
 A mound of moving earth, that wastes and smells ;  
 The World's distemper ; its prime pestilence :  
 He frets his neighbour, and disgusts himself.

And this, surely, is Tennyson anywhere :

Where swans more white than sun-kissed Alpine snow  
 Sail silently upon a sapphire sea.

That, as against this, I hold the pure, original, underivative Hervey to declare himself in such a passage as :

NURSE. With unmatched truth do *I* recount a lie.  
 SEVERINA. Then faithfully re-tell thy well-spiced tale,  
 That I may drop off sweetly in a dream.

- NURSE. To sup of devil's brew, and sweetly dream ?  
 'Twere easier, methinks, to milk the ram :  
 Thy regal breast should straightway be distraught,  
 Thy royal blood brought sizzling to the boil.
- SEVERINA. Ah, for night-cap let me have such a tale  
 As makes the blood to dance about the veins  
 Like quicksilver ; where thief soul cut-throat kills,  
 And cut-throats thieve : a plot that reeks of rape ;  
 A carnal, crimson plot of blood and lust ;  
 A cunning, treacherous, cowardly plot :  
 Then shall I sink in sweet oblivion.
- NURSE. And by my stars I know of such a plot ;  
 A cunning, treacherous, cowardly plot  
 Which, poured into thine ear, would seald the drum  
 As oil fetched freshly from the lamps of Hell :  
 A tale to incit the marrow in thy bones  
 Like molten fat ; rattle the dead molars  
 In thy withered jaws ; make thy fleshless knees  
 To knock like hammers in a cobbler's camp.
- SEVERINA. Sing on, my merry mouse ; sing sweetly on.  
 Thy music thrills me to my heart's red core.

And I shall end by saying that it would take two Sarah Siddonses to do justice to this, and alas, we haven't one ! And close on a note of thanks for a magnificent feast of language utterly unlike anything these pale times afford.

*Nov. 6      Our intellectuals :*  
*Monday.*

Phrases and even single words in Hopkins are often, as Mr Gardner points out, poems in themselves. After Shakespeare, probably no other English writer has given life to so many technical, obsolete, and dialect terms. The "rash, smart, *sloggering* brine" snatches an expressive word from the cricket field.

G. W. STONER, *in the "New Statesman"*

The schoolboy who was guilty of this would get a *flogging* from the Games Captain.

*Nov. 7      From George Richards :*  
*Tuesday.*

It is now known that the Rev. I. M. Becile is *not* to be appointed to the Primacy of All England as forecast last week, the favourite for the vacancy in authoritative quarters being Dr Frank Muffin, whose sermons attracted such large congregations when he was manager of the Brighton Aquarium.

The Rev. I. M. Becile is to have the compensation, however, of being appointed to the *Lunacy* of All England, the present Lunate being expected to retire shortly and return to the Netherpool Asylum.

Nov. 8        Another letter from my Charming Old Lady :  
*Wednesday.*

*November 7th, 1944*

My small book is promised for this month : I intended it for a Christmas gift : I will send you a copy. I wrote it under great difficulties, seated in my invalid chair, in dark days and failing sight. I have heart trouble, and my life, of course, is uncertain.

My father's Memoirs are curious : he was born in 1817, in a private house then adjoining St Bride's Church. Fleet river, called Ditch, ran down Fleet Street : and oh ! the odour. He said, dead dogs and cats : no pavements, no curb, therefore the black liquid mud was everywhere ; noisy cobblestones rattled under coaches and carts.

My grandfather bought Nos. 157-8 Fleet Street : there I saw Queen Alexandra enter London. She was terrified, for the mob nearly upset her carriage, the police then not taught how to control. They struck right and left, losing their tempers. My grandfather was visited by Dr Lettsom, friend of Dr Johnson, so I am a link with him. Also I am a link with Nelson, my father's naval instructor having served under him.

My house is Victorian, furniture, curtains, pictures, my dress and jewels. No telephone or radio here. Old French furniture also, it is like a museum : I have a jewel and curious family small box, four hundred years old. I am now selling a large cabinet, made for Louis XVI. The King made the locks and keys. I am overcrowded.

My greatest surprise is how ill every one is, constantly undergoing operations : and having teeth out, tonsils out, etc. We were not permitted to be ill in my early days : my mother would have been indignant. Nor were we at the chemist's ; servants I never knew laid up for a day. We lived carefully, and food was genuine.

I am tiring you out : old gossip, you will say. . . .

The allusion to Dr Lettsom gives me the greatest possible thrill. I at once turned him up in Boswell and found that he was one of the company at that dinner-party at Mr Dilly's at which Wilkes paid Johnson the nicest attention and helped him

to roast veal. ("Pray give me leave, Sir . . . A little of the brown . . . A squeeze of this orange; or the lemon, perhaps, may have more zest.")

*Nov. 10 Letter from Jock :  
Friday.*

*E5 Ward  
R.N. Hospital  
Haslar*

*Thursday, 8th or 9th Nov.*

DEAR JAMIE,

Thank you for a letter which I don't feel fit to answer this morning. (I don't improve as quickly as I might. I suppose I should take Mrs Chick's advice to the first Mrs Dombey, and Make An Effort. But indeed I give most of my energy and leisure to re-reading that same great and enchanting novel.)

All I will answer is that paragraph about my dear V. and L. You do not—you never do—sufficiently allow for the fact that fashions change in public behaviour as in all things else. It is now the fashion for the Major Dramatic Critic (and not for the Leading Players) to make the " Herc's Me ! " sort of entrance into theatres and restaurants. Whereas V. wearing a long train that knocked tables over, and L. parading in black astrakhan, would be just ridiculous in these altered times. So come off it, Jamie—as the parodist in the *New Statesman* makes me say to you.

Ever,  
Jock

P.S. 1. The fatal flaw in your new *Hamlet* game is that "living memory" is too elastic by far. Look upon Maurice Baring's living memory—and then look upon that of Lionel Hale!

P.S. 2. How prodigal is Dickens's genius! And how he could characterise (the rarest virtue in your novelist) almost without being able to help it. Here is a striking example: *Dombey*. A young woman appears at the top of the stairs in Dr Blimber's house and is kind to little Paul. She is not "drawn"; she is hardly even named; she takes no part in the plot. Yet she is to me more alive—I remember her clearly after an interval of twenty-two years—than almost any character in any new novel. Here is the whole of her.

[At this point Jock copies out all that Dickens ever set down about 'Melia.]

That is the whole history of 'Melia—only the shadow of a shade, but how tangible a shadow !

P.S. 8. Ellen Terry for Gertrude is brilliant indeed.

*Nov. 11* Here is what I said to the Bloomsbury Youth Saturday. Movement this afternoon. I began by confessing to a rooted contempt for Bloomsbury, a profound distrust of Youth, and an immense scepticism as to the value of any Movement. An atmosphere of cordial hostility being established, I proceeded to talk to about ten different races, including three coloured ones. Subject: Modern Writing. I spoke without notes, and reconstruct :

Critics before now have outlived their day and usefulness. Those critics who declared that Wagner's music was a mass of meaningless cacophony, that Ibsen's plays were foul and indecent, that Matisse couldn't draw, should have resigned their jobs to younger men. Obviously those who to-day criticise the music of Béla Bartók, the plays of Maxwell Anderson, and the sculptures of Henry Moore must, remembering the old lesson, watch their step.

All over the country thousands of young men, possibly hundreds of thousands, are beginning to write. And they are taking, as their model, publications like *Modern Reading*, *Modern Writing*, and compilations like the one I am holding in my hand. This is called *A Map of Hearts*, and is a collection of short stories edited by Stefan Schimanski and Henry Treece, published by a high-class firm at the price of eight shillings and sixpence. Mr Treece contributes one of the tales, and must obviously stand by his own contribution. It is from this that I am going to read, because it is this kind of thing which our young men and women are going to copy. But before reading *The Pilgrim and the Soldier* I am going to take you back to a tale in Rudyard Kipling's *Many Inventions*, the tale called *The Finest Story in the World*. Here is the opening :

" His name was Charlie Mears ; he was the only son of his mother who was a widow, and he lived in the North of London, coming into the City every day to work in a bank. He was twenty years old and was full of aspirations. I met him in a public billiard-saloon where the marker called him by his first name, and he called the marker ' Bullseye.' Charlie explained, a little nervously, that he had only come to the

place to look on, and since looking on at games of skill is not a cheap amusement for the young, I suggested that Charlie should go back to his mother."

And here is Mr Treece's opening :

"The red strings of his desire, scorning the midnight screech-owl in the ruined tower, the fox's russet eyes in the broken wall, drew his thick feet along the poplar-pinioned track. As the cold rain raped his shuddering shoulders, bat-blind his eyes, Lover crept, wrapped in the moment she had promised, his head on fire with lust, the young hands twitching like crickets with desire."

The stories were not chosen at random ; the core of each is a dream. Charlie Mears, as all the world knows, in the end married a tobacconist's assistant with a curly head and a foolish, slack mouth. Lover, a British soldier, was different. His choice fell on a French peasant girl who spoke in "mouse-fur words," and whose brazen hair "writhed, vicious as a maelstrom of adders about her ears." As she repeated the word "Come," the edge of her skirt "snarled like a kicked cur's lip." At the same time "the twin doves of her hands coaxed madness out of the room's black corners into the coffin of his belly." And finally in Lover's arms she lay, "like lamb's wool dangling on a park gate." Whereupon Lover bore his burden into the straw-strewn barn, what time his "velvct feet, soft as a mole's remorse, flinched on the knotty grain of steps." And presently "Lover, clad again to face his fellows, went from the house as silent as a tree."

I suggest to you that Charlie Mears is a person, whereas Lover is merely a personification. Be straight with me. Do you young people take Lover to be real and alive as Charlie Mears was and is ?

In my view a great deal of this modern stuff is nonsense. I do not believe that hair can be vicious, or that moles feel remorse. Or that if they do, there is any connection between that remorse and the soles of soldiers' feet. If this new stuff makes sense and is going to make sense in fifty years' time, as Kipling makes sense after fifty years, then I will consider whether I ought not to retire from the business of criticism. Mind you, I don't promise to do more than consider. There was an occasion on which Gladstone threatened to resign the Premiership if he was opposed on some matter. He was opposed, and when asked about his resignation said, "I have considered it. I shall not resign." Which means two things.

I shall not resign, and I shall go on denouncing what I take to be bosh as bosh.

I fancy I gave a very modern audience something to think about, and certainly they were not ruder than I expected.

Nov. 13 *A Song to Remember*, at the New Gallery, is a jumble *Monday*. of nonsense. It begins with somebody called Showpan as a small child composing that D flat Valse which is now known as Opus 64, No. 1. In the twinkling of an eye he grows up into a tall, strapping, full-faced young athlete, and then apparently spends some fifteen years with George Sand in Majorca. Is there a film story here? If there is it would have to be the story of the author of *Consuelo*, who, I feel sure, looked like a horse and certainly worked like one. Doubtless she was a very great artist and a redoubtable thinker—which did not prevent her from being as a woman possessive and ridiculous, a wit and an unmitigated nuisance and bore. No, there is no film here. Wherefore the authors have had recourse to a consumptive Showpan weeping over the soil of his native country and, in order to provide funds for the Poles, making fictitious tours of the world's capitals, including Rome, Vienna, Budapest, Amsterdam, and Stockholm, all in Glorious Technicolor giving effect to the bloodstains on the ivory keys. The picture is stolen by Paul Muni as Joseph Elsner, Showpan's teacher, who manages to combine Edward Terry in *Sweet Lavender* with John Harc in *A Pair of Spectacles*. Merle Oberon is as much like George Sand as I am like de Musset. Cornel Wilde's Showpan is exactly like Haystack Duggeler in Runyon's tale. H., if you remember, is Baseball Hattie's private property, and, says his creator, "with two ounces of brains will be the greatest pitcher that ever lives." Cornel must have these two ounces of brains, since if he hasn't we are all laughing at Showpan and somehow we aren't. At least, not much.

Nov. 14 For some time now my life has resolved itself into *Tuesday*. receiving and answering letters. The first I opened to-day was a demand to know the worth of Volume One of *Paradise Lost*, printed in 1849,  $4 \times 8 \times 1\frac{1}{2}$  inches. "I daresay somebody else has the second volume."

The second letter was a request from an airman in the M.E.F. to help him to place a book of humorous monologues.

The third was from Brother Harry, telling me that for two years he has been the day-by-day custodian of the second, or safety, copy of May's Sarah Bernhardt book. This in addition to his custody of *Ego*. Wonderful ! The letter ends :

Some years ago I told you, and you recorded the fact in *Ego* 5, that I had completed 15,000 miles on my cycle since I was 50. My cyclometers tell me that I am about to record 30,000 miles ! And I am not yet 60, being but a youth of 58, and I still refuse to grow old. The pastime I foreshadowed in my letter to you dated 25/11/40 has not yet been embarked upon. I still " Youth Hostel " with tremendous enjoyment. Even my offspring says I am quite a good companion on a holiday. Maybe I am not quite so elastic as I was—an odd and occasional wheeze now and again proclaims it, and a bottle in the bed o' nights comes not amiss, but I will not forsake jollity and good fun. I still refuse to become crabbed and inattentive to the chatter of youngsters.

The pastime Harry promised himself when he should be " less young " was bowls. Have replied on a p.c. : " Keep the flag flying. Mine has got to the fluttering stage, which is still better than the flapping."

Fourth letter was from Clifford Bax, in his usual exquisite hand :

*D2 Albany  
Piccadilly*

November 13th, '44

MY DEAR JAMES,

If you can manage it, you will give me much pleasure by reporting for duty at La Corvette (Arlington Street, just behind the Ritz) at 7.15 on Friday, the 17th. I want you to be punctual because (a) restaurants now wait for no man, and (b) being kept waiting puts me into an unBUDDHISTIC rage.

Now, Jimmie Agate, you critic of plays,  
Here's a subject made to your hand.

A lady has offered to put up £10,000 after the war if I like to start a kind of Super-Stage-Society. What plays would you choose from those that we know about already ? At present I have not got further than *Sakuntala* (Binyon's version is said to be good), *Paolo and Francesca* (Phillips), *The House of*

*Borgia* (Bax), and *The Fair Maid of the West* (Heywood). I should exult in presenting *'Tis Pity*, but the praiseworthy Wolfit has done it recently enough. I should do my best, of course, to find distinguished contemporary foreign plays, but will Europe write such plays until another twenty years have gone? And by that time I shall be pleading with St Peter to allow you just occasionally to come up and see how the angels can interpret the Baxian masterpieces.

Yours with friendship and admiration,

C. B.

My reply :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*

November 14th, 1944

MY DEAR CLIFFORD,

I shall be there on Friday, and if not on the dot, then on a neighbouring one.

Yes, I think your Super-Stage-Society is a very good notion. Nobody can be induced to go to a plain cinema, whereas every one will flock to a Super-Cinema. But your present programme leaves me cold. I am horrified at the prospect of anything with a name like *Sakuntalā*, which smacks of India and anklets. To sit through *Paolo and Francesca* is like making a meal of pineapple cream. *The House of Borgia*. Non, mon vieux! The play of yours which ought to be revived is *Socrates*, but only if you can get Lewis Casson. Last, I don't care two hoots whether the Fair Maid came from the West, the East, the North, or the South. But then I know exactly what will happen to your Society. You will begin with a revival of *Twelfth Night*. You will follow this with the revival of some piece of Shavian talkativeness, and wind up with a reproduction of whatever masterpiece by Jack Priestley came off in the West End the week before.

But if you were serious! Of the great plays I have seen and should like to see again, here are one or two. Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, which in the theatre I prefer to either *Cymbeline* or *Troilus and Cressida*. Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy*, with Sonia Dresdel as Evadne. Colman's *The Clandestine Marriage*. Do you remember Hazlitt? Ogleby, he says, "is as crazy a piece of elegance and refinement, even after he is wound up for the day, as can be well imagined; yet in the hands of a genuine actor his tottering step, his twitches of the gout, his unsuccessful attempts at youth and gaiety, take nothing from the nobleman. He has the *ideal* model in his mind, resents his deviations from it with proper horror, recovers himself from any

ungraceful action as soon as possible ; does all he can with his limited means, and fails in his just pretensions, not from inadvertence, but necessity." O. B. Clarence was superb in this part when I saw him sixteen years ago. He is, I am glad to say, alive and hearty, and could still play Ogleby. I am particularly fond of this play and this performance, and would think ten thousand pounds well spent on a venture which began and ended with this. And how about Drinkwater's *Robert E. Lee*, Richard Pryce's *Frolic Wind*, and Jean Cocteau's *Les Parents Terribles* ?

Now a few plays I have never seen but want to. What about Olivier in Massinger's *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* ? Judging from his Richard III, his Sir Giles Overreach should be very fine. Then why not Mr G. and Wolfit as Jaffier and Pierre in Otway's *Venice Preserved* ? The main difficulty would be to get these two actors on to the same stage at the same time, John taking fright at Wolfit's over-plus of power, and Wolfit shying at John's elegances. "Two stars keep not their motion in one splicre." And then Belvidera would be another difficulty. Byron was right to describe her as a "maudlin bitch"; nevertheless the part takes acting, and is beyond the reach of our modern ninnies about four foot six inches high and weighing four stone three. Lastly I want to see Ibsen's *Pillars of Society*. If you guarantee me the above programme without any deletions you can put me down for the sum of one guinea.

Ever your  
JAMES

P.S. A remark I overheard to-day may amuse you :

1ST YOUNG HIGHBROW. At least you must allow that Gielgud is a good actor.

2ND YOUNG HIGHBROW. I just wouldn't know. I'm allergic to *Hamlet*.

Next Dicky Helme weighs in with a screed about Pasta which interests me because of my connection with the Garcia family. He is quoting from *The Locks of Norbury*, by the Duchess of Sermoneta :

Pasta sang for the last time at the Haymarket in 1850 more than thirty years after her first appearance there. Her powers were failing, and Rachel, the great Jewish actress, was among the audience and ridiculed her performance. Pasta was singing selections from *Anna Bolena*, and she

braced herself in a supreme effort at the end for the famous mad scene, which she would never sing again. When as the wretched Queen, condemned to death, who hears the coronation music playcd for her rival, she, with shaking hands, searched for the crown on her own brow, Pasta was so magnificent that the audience broke out into the old irresistible cheers. Pauline Viardot-Garcia, who was present, turned to her companion with her eyes full of tears and said, " You are right. It is like the Ceracolo of Da Vinci at Milan! A wreck of a picture—but the picture is the greatest in the world."

Last this postcard from Jock :

E5 Ward (tell Leo—not F6)  
R.N. Hospital

*Haslar*

I have no energy to offer to survey the proofs of *Immoment Toys*. Sorry. I feel chilly and grown old. "J'étois jeune et superbe"—with insistence on the imperfect tense of the verb.

Macready has retired this afternoon, and Paul Dombey died last night (and how !), and the following century interests me not at all.

Your dour and dowie  
Jock

Whereupon I wrote :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*  
November 14th, 1944

DEAR JOCK,

But you should have been with me this afternoon at the revival of the Marx Brothers' *A Night at the Opera*. I laughed till the tears ran down my cheeks. Do you remember the three Italian aviators who look alike, dress alike, and wear vast, identical beards ? Which prompts Groucho to ask : " Is that three fellows, or one man with three beards ? " The opera is *Il Trovatore*, and from now on I never want to hear it without the Marx Brothers. But then I never want to hear it anyway, as Groucho would observe.

It was all the funnier because I had just lunched with Cedric Hardwicke, who told me of an evening at Groucho's when he played snooker, or some such game, with Groucho for his partner. He, Cedric, had only to pot a ball hanging on the lip of the pocket to win the match for his side. He mis-cued. There was a silence, and presently Groucho said,

" Does any guy here know how to tell a British nobleman he stinks ? "

Cedric says that we owe a lot to the English actors over there for having kept Hollywood on an even keel in the matter of British feeling. There were three factors very active against us. (1) The pro-Nazi sympathies of the German-born film producers. (2) The fact, of which we lose sight too often, that American independence is built up on a break with this country. (3) The difficulty of persuading a young American killing a German in North Italy that he is doing it to protect Texas. However, these be deep waters. At the moment I am more interested in the comparatively shallow stuff now laving all but seven hundred feet of the *Tirpitz*'s dirty bottom.

JAMIE

*Nov. 15* Went to see Hollywood's version of Van Druten's *Wednesday. Old Acquaintance*. Shall burst into prose in the *S.T.* Something on these lines :

Consider great whales. Think of tumbling oceans. Of lazy, tropic beaches and feathery trees. Of mountain-tops that freeze. Of earthquakes and cataclysms. Of all the things the film can do magnificently and the theatre cannot look at. And then the time came when even the film-makers got tired of looking at it, and decided there was more " to " the pictures than the mere presentation of the outdoor and the outsize. Hence those warning shadows, those garrets under Paris roofs, that swirl of skirts above a dropped dance-programme, those enigmatic sledges, those equivocal glooms. The decision once taken that the pictures should cease being a paranoid panorama and become " cinema," the ensuing coquettings with famous novels were inevitable. Would *Mea Culpa* look well in Lydia Bennet's sprigged muslin ? Would *Thea Culpa* find Dora Spenlow's bonnet sufficiently becoming ? Would *Maxima Culpa* shine at the Duchess of Richmond's ball ? Of course. Wherefore these things came to pass. I have never been able to make out who's who in *Wuthering Heights*, but it didn't prevent Olivier from being extremely effective in the snow and among gorse. I was never able to get through *Gone with the Wind*, which didn't prevent me from revelling in Vivien Leigh's presentation of some swaying, tossing tulip.

Later the theatre was laid under contribution. And foolishly

*Iffrah Neaman*  
(See p. 293)



*By courtesy of the "Daily Express"*



*Last Portrait of Sarah*  
(See p. 84)

people said, "How Shakespeare would have welcomed the films!" quoting in support Chorus's

Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them  
Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth.

Either Shakespeare wrote this in a hurry or he just wasn't an intellectual. Anyhow, a moment's reflection would have convinced him that when you can see horses prancing and curveting there ceases to be any need to put that prancing and curveting into words. "You've had it." Neville Cardus once wrote of Woolley's off-drives that they were "like butterflies going into the flame." But he was writing for a public which had not seen Woolley's innings. I had been with Cardus at Lord's that afternoon, and what he said was not "Look at that butterfly going into the flame!" but "Well played, sir!" Consider *Hamlet*, and what an appalling amount of extraneous stuff the film will have to show if it is going to be something more than a strict photograph of the acted play. We shall be shown the young Fortinbras sharking up his lawless resolutes; Claudius taking his rouse; the morn, in Technicolor clad, walking o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill; the glow-worm paling his ineffectual fire; the wind setting in the corner of Laertes' sail; what Danskers are in Paris; Hamlet's voyage to England, with his first and last essay in pocket-picking; Ophelia pull'd to muddy death; and flashbacks showing Hamlet *père* sleeping in his orchard, and Yorick bearing Hamlet *fils* on his back.

The itch to reproduce A in terms of B knows no cure. Witness the cinema organist in full blast at something composed for the violin, radio fiddlers scraping away at something written for the piano, and concert pianists hammering out pieces devised for full orchestra—for example, the Overture to *Tannhäuser*. It is partly this mania for transformation and partly the paucity of original ideas which has driven Hollywood into its versions of stage plays. Here it resembles that sailor who, in the lady's novel, steering for both Scylla and Charybdis, was in danger of missing both. The essence of the theatre is that everything is happening in a small, artificially lighted box: the essence of the cinema is that it has the whole daylight world to play about in. Scylla is the mere photographing of the play, in which case the cinema loses everything it stands for. Charybdis

is going outside the play and showing you in action that which on the stage is merely related ; this brings to nothing all the art and craft of play-making. In the theatre Van Druten's comedy was reasonably exciting because it fulfilled expectations aroused in a theatre, and because it was a comedy of good manners to which Edith Evans brought a whole armoury of wit and irony, while Marian Spencer, fortified by some preposterous hats, was the embodiment of delicious and fluffy riot. The film made the play seem dull because, while happening in a cinema, it turned its back on the cinema's peculiar qualities of change, variety, and excitement, and partly because the play had been turned into a comedy of bad manners. Bette Davis elected to make several appearances in pyjamas lacking the lower half, and indulged in the solecism : "Let you and I talk it over." (Shade of Millamant !) As for the goose-like little novelist, methought Miriam Hopkins's performance the last thing in tedium.

*Nov. 16*      Spent the day correcting the proofs of *Immoment Thursday. Toys*. Particularly pleased with the suggestion, which I had forgotten, that Gracie Fields should play St Joan.

Violet Loraine told me at lunch that it was to her that Mrs Pat made that one of her sallies which I regard as the least expected and most glorious. It was at a soirée at Claridge's or somewhere, at which a famous coloratura singer was to perform. She came on. Mrs Pat, taking one look at the singer's enormous jowl, stopped chatting to the duchess on her other side and said to Vi, "My God ! She looks like I do in a spoon ! "

*Nov. 17*      Dined with Clifford Bax. He is inclined to think his *Friday*. find may be a portrait of Shakespeare in his old age. Some story about this having been presented to an Italian convent by the Earl of Nithsdale, who is a bee in the Baxian bonnet since he wrote a play about him or rather his lady. If I had believed more in the play I should perhaps be a greater believer in the portrait ! The face shows a man in to-day's middle sixties, which probably correspond to the Elizabethan early fifties ; the features are those of one who might have written *The Tempest*. The hand, in which is a quill,

is raised as though about to make corrections in something that looks like a bound manuscript. There is a lot of lettering on the back, lettering which I think is too explicit. C. B. is tremendously excited by his find, but thinks it will probably turn out to be a picture of Cervantes or somebody. I said, "That would a little dash your spirits." He took me at once, saying, "Not a jot, not a jot."

Nov. 18      Shocked to see in *The Times* that Archie MacLaren Saturday. is dead. I remember the thrill with which, as a good little Lancastrian—the year was 1890 and I was thirteen—I read that in his first match for Lancashire a newcomer, who was still a schoolboy, had scored 108. The match must have been in August; I know I was spending the holidays at Appletreewick, in Yorkshire. I read the earth-shaking news of his record score of 424 in the stop-press in my father's evening paper, which he handed to me as I was sitting on a form in the garden at home, mugging up the *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. I was getting by heart the famous "Never lighted on this orb" passage, and to this day MacLaren's blade is one with those ten thousand swords which Burke said should have leaped from their scabbards to defend the Queen of France. The best innings I ever saw MacLaren play was against Somerset on a frightful pitch, with S. M. J. Woods bowling at his deadliest. If my memory serve, Lancashire's score was round about 68, of which MacLaren made 47 not out, all by forcing strokes like prizing the cork out of a bottle of glue. On a hard wicket Archie was majesty's self; one seldom saw his stumps shattered. "We do him wrong, being so majestical, to offer him the show of violence," seemed to be at the back of every bowler's mind. Therefore when Archie got out it would be through attempting a picce of arrogance in the direction of long-leg, or through not quite getting hold of one. I remember that in the last Test Match I saw at Manchester he went in first, knocked up twenty in less than no time, and was caught on the boundary behind the bowler off a low drive which never left the ground more than six feet. Others have described the setting of this sun. I saw it rise. I was present when Archie made his first appearance at Old Trafford. I saw him just above the horizon, decorating and cheering the elevated

sphere he just began to move in, glittering like the morning star, full of life, and splendour, and joy . . .

*Nov. 19 Conversation in Grapc Street :  
Sunday.*

J. A. Have you seen Newman's article on Mahler ?

L. P. (*molto vivace*). Mostly I saw Mahler's back. I only met him face to face once. This was during a rehearsal at the Vienna Hofoper. I was accompanying a certain coloratura singer in the mad scene from *Lucia*. As you know, there is a flute obbligato, and she was arguing with the flautist because they weren't together. In the middle of this in comes the Direktor like a whirlwind, and says, "Stop, stop ! Frau S\_\_\_\_\_, you are bawling like a street-singer. And you, Herr Z\_\_\_\_\_, just because Frau S\_\_\_\_\_ is out of voice is no reason why you should be out of tune !" Turning to me : "And what is that for an accompaniment ?" And, clasping his head with both hands, he cries, "Dear God, what have I done to deserve this menagerie ?" And rushes out, leaving the door wide open. Rudeness was one of Mahler's characteristics. He loved insulting people, and the more celebrated they were the more he enjoyed insulting them. It was this that finally brought about his dismissal ; for he was undoubtedly the greatest producer of opera as well as the greatest conductor of his age. A combination of Reinhardt and Richter. But about his work there was always a little doubt. Personally, I think that a man who handled so much of other people's stuff was bound to be influenced. That is why in the symphonies we hear so many direct echoes of Schubert, Wagner, Strauss, Bruckner, and even Beethoven. But the Mahlerites always took the master's music very seriously : in Vienna they called it philosophic-aesthetic, dæmonic, ethereal, world-surveying, didactic. I remember overhearing two students at a concert in Vienna after a performance of his Fourth Symphony. One said, "Pure Nietzsche." "Not at all," said the other, "pure Schopenhauer : *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*." One critic called this converted Jew's *Das Lied von der Erde* super-Christian !

J. A. (*interrupting*). Thank you for your lecture. But you haven't told me whether you have read Ernest's article.

L. P. No, I haven't. Read me some of it.

J. A. He is giving his reasons why "performers and listeners alike need to have a general idea of Mahler's specific mental world as a whole before they can see a particular work of his precisely as it is in itself."

L. P. And what do you say to that ?

J. A. I say that I don't have to read the whole of Swift to know that his Tub stands on its own bottom. All tubs should, and I don't see why Mahler's should be the exception. In any case, if I have to hear the whole of those interminable symphonies before I can get any pleasure out of three bars of any one of them—no, thank you, it's too much like work.

L. P. I don't think you quite understand the modern attitude to art. We old-fashioned people used to look for beauty. The modern artist loathes it. All he wants is idea, technique, the getting away from everything that has been done before. Schumann was the first composer to tie up music with literature; these young people want all the arts to talk metaphysics. I heard one in a studio the other day saying to a friend, "Gerald, my dear idiot, don't keep on blathering about line and tone and all that ghastly pre-war stuff. Just look at the *inner psychology* of the thing. That is all that matters. Is Blank's psychology sufficiently inner?"

J. A. (*who has had enough*). B—— psychology ! I'm going to lunch.

*Nov. 20 From Neville Cardus :*  
*Monday.*

*85 West End  
Crick Avenue  
Potts Point  
Sydney*

*November 1, 1944*

MY DEAR JAMES,

Your letter gave me immense joy—and immense relief. Had I known that Pavia was reading the proofs also, I might have suffered terrible apprehensions ; for I have a vast awe of his sanity and realistic humour—and I am aware that I took a few risks in the book. It contains the best of me, I know ; but it is good to have one's opinion backed up by a competent authority. I don't think I could have chosen two people whose good opinion I'd rather have had than yours and Pavia's. This is God's truth. You say, "What about returning to this country ?" Nobody's asked me—in any case I won't go back to daily criticism of concerts.

I am finishing my autobiography, of which I have the most fluctuating opinions. Some of it seems to me astonishingly good—and what a life ! You are in it, and all the old M.G. lot, and there's a chapter on Langford which is genius. . . . I read everything you write ; and I'm waiting for *Ego 7*. I

want the new edition of *Responsibility*—can't get it here. I have been faithful to it for years: I read it from street-lamp to street-lamp while I delivered insurance policies in Manchester.

God bless and preserve you.

Ever,  
NEVILLE

*Nov. 21 From Jock :  
Tuesday.*

*E5 Ward  
R.N. Hospital  
Haslar, Hants*

*19th November, 1944*

DEAR JAMIE,

I still cannot comply with your demand to get better wholly and at once. Is there any reason in Nature why the dermis, which being by far the most accessible part of the human body should be the easiest to cure when seriously out of order, is nevertheless of all parts the least responsive to modern therapeutics? It is a fact that it is so. Ophelia's lunacy, Othello's epilepsy, Caesar's falling-sickness, could be more quickly put to rights by to-day's Harley Street, it would seem, than that "most instant tetter" that bark'd about all the smooth body of King Hamlet of Denmark. There is, it seems, some subtle poison in my blood.

Talking of poison, I have just received an actual holograph letter written by Dr Crippen's victim, Belle Elmore, dated February 1904. Does not that make your Egofaciene fume with envy? It is a present from one who knows me for a Serendipator, and it will keep admirable company with letters of Edmund Kean and Mlle Déjazet already in my small but budding collection. Anything in this line you may have lying about your desk from Ellen Terry, or Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, or Talma, or Hazlitt, or Jane Austen, or Groucho Marx, or Strindberg, or Charlotte Corday, or Paganini, or Walt Whitman, or Little Tich, or Charles Peace, will be most welcome now, or at Christmas, or on my fortieth birthday on the 7th of January next, or all three.

I am pleased to see myself in a just-out volume of *Modern Essays* (Macmillan) in the multivarious company of E. M. Forster, Osbert Lancaster, Martin-Harvey, Stephen Spender, Joad, John Betjeman, Julian Huxley, Sir James Jeans, Sir Charles Darwin, Bernard Darwin, Virginia Woolf, and the late Archbishop of Canterbury; and that the notes credit

me with having been some time "your understudy, so to speak." I am nearly as pleased to see myself as a dedicatee in James Monahan's first book of poems, *Far from the Land* (Macmillan). I am not less pleased to see myself announced as one of the contributors to the imminent *Saturday Book* of Leonard Russell (Hutchinson). So it seems my light is not entirely hidden under this damned nautical bushel!

Ever thy  
Jock

I have replied to this :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*  
*November 21st, 1944*

DEAR JOCK,

The fact that Monahan's *Far from the Land* is dedicated to "Albertine, Mauve, and Jock" has been duly noted in Grape Street, and has inspired Leo and me to the composition of a ballad to your address on the Frank Lambert model. Needless to say, L. has insisted on writing the lyric while I have been impressed into composing the music. The old thing is not very well—suffering from bronchitis and ulcerated stomach. I cannot decide which causes *me* the greater distress. Also I cannot persuade him that six Veganin tablets dissolved in a wine-glass of chlorodyne taken neat is not the orthodox treatment for either complaint. There is something Dickensian in hearing him wail about loss of appetite and watching him dispose at the same time of soup, leg of mutton with two vegetables, and two helpings of apple-tart, together with anything on my plate he fancies.

Your letter to me, my dear Jock, was inconsiderate in one particular. You ought to have known that I should at once start rummaging in my desk, cupboards, and the round-bellied chest of drawers—d'you remember it?—for letters for your collection, and that this would mean the loss of a day's work. But never mind that. I have come across some extraordinary things. A letter written to my mother on my eleventh birthday : "Thank you so much for your half-crown it was a delightful surprise. I will try and keep it till my next birthday." After which you'll be delighted to know that I added, "If I can." Next a letter from Brother Edward during my first term at Giggleswick : "How are you getting on with Beethoven's Sonata? We shall expect you to play it to us when you come back for the summer holidays." (This was the sonata, Op. 14, No. 2.) Also the fly-leaf of Edward's pocket diary, quoted in *Ego 8*, page 76. I have thought that you might like to have this last.

Among pukka celebrities I send you the original of the first two letters by Aimée Desclée quoted in *Ego* 4, page 105. Also a magnificent letter from C. E. Montague, and very good ones from Allan Monkhouse, Filson Young, Humbert Wolfe, and Edgar Wallace. Finally, as a *bonne bouche*, here is a *carte de visite* of Sarah at the age of twenty.

And that's all.

Ever,  
JAMIE

*Nov. 22* What fun words are ! In response to Clifford Bax's *Wednesday*. request to find him some good old plays I tackled Cyril Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Act i, scene 1, takes place "Near the House of Gratiana," and the stage direction is :

*Enter VENDICE. The DUKE, DUCHESS, LUSSURIOSO, SPURIO, with a train, pass over the stage with torchlight.*

A footnote to Vendice adds "With a skull in his hand. That it is the skull of his mistress is evident from the whole of the scene." The play then starts :

VEN. Duke ! royal lecher ! go, grey-haired adultery !  
 And thou his son, as impious steeped as he :  
 And thou his bastard true begot in evil :  
 And thou his duchess, that will do with devil :  
 Four excellent characters ! Oh, that marrowless age  
 Should stuff the hollow bones with damned desires !  
 And, 'stead of heat, kindle infernal fires  
 Within the spendthrift veins of a dry duke,  
 A parched and juiceless luxur. O God ! one,  
 That has scarce blood enough to live upon ;  
 And he to riot it, like a son and heir !  
 O, the thought of that  
 Turns my abused heart-strings into fret.

Henceforth, when any whisper of what in a young man would be riot crosses my mind, I shall say, "Fie, James ! Fie upon this parched and juiceless luxur ! "

*Nov. 28* Part of a letter from a lady :  
*Thursday.*

Have been three times lately to see Mr Gielgud's *Hamlet*. And, each time, have been as rapt and enthralled as the rest of the audience—those lovely words—that lovely voice and diction—that princely bearing—noble conception ! Came out, feeling as one imagines some musical enthusiast would do on hearing a Paderewski or Kreisler perform his favourite

piece.—*Perfect work—perfect interpretation—perfect instrument!*—And then—as you yourself said of his previous presentation, “That’s Gielgud—that was!” Was it Mr Gielgud’s reputation, dazzling one, and causing one to concentrate on the actor’s virtuosity, rather than the woes of Hamlet?—Twenty years ago I saw the same play at the same theatre. The star was John Barrymore, and I was twenty, and had only seen one Shakespearean play before. Surely, more of an occasion for confused and englamoured dazzlement and distraction—but I cried for Hamlet! Barrymore was smaller—hardly as princely in bearing, with a lighter voice. Nor had he the same way with poetry. He said: “Things rank and gross in nature possess it *mee-eerely!*”—and things like that, stressing unexpected words with great and inexplicable vehemence! And what a cold he had! His speeches were punctuated with the most resounding sniffs and snorts heard in any theatre since. His Hamlet was a *much* coarser fellow than Mr Gielgud’s, too. But I only have to read my *Hamlet* now to hear and see him! Do you remember him in the closet scene? (Mr MacCarthy faulted it—said it was too intense, with Freudian implications, or something! Freudian fiddlesticks!) Do you remember how he launched himself, still kneeling, at Gertrude, as he besought her to lay not that flattering unction to her soul?—he *pommelled* the floor with his knees, a desperate, impotent little action, like a very small child whose emotions have gone past its powers of expression. A youthful action, most calculated to pull at the mother’s heart.

Nov. 24 Our intellectuals. Rhys Davies, in a publication *Friday*. entitled *Wales*, edited by Keidrych Rhys:

This morning, waiting for a connection in a Chelsea telephone-box, I watched a dog sniffing a lamp-post across the street in such a concentrated way that I, concentrated too in my crystal box, found myself becoming that dog; the magic correspondence was achieved. More, I gradually found myself *in the snout*; I experienced all its ecstatic quivers, I knew with piercing certainty the dog’s intense curiosity and, finally, the clear-cut satisfaction of the curiosity.

Nov. 25 *The Times*, which reached its 50,000th number to-Saturday. included this in its Historical Epitome:

The advent of the steam press came like a bolt from the blue

to the hand-press workers in Printing House Square. The dramatic moment was well illustrated in last night's broadcast. John Walter II had called the workers together one night and told them that they could go home. "Sir," said a workman, "we have not gone to print yet." "*To-morrow's Times*," said John Walter, "is already printed—by steam."

I think I should have gone on to quote Hazlitt's "In that prodigious prosing paper, *The Times*, which seems to be written as well as printed by a steam-engine . . ." Have seen no reference anywhere to the one thing which sets *The Times* apart from every other daily except the *Manchester Guardian*—it engages men of culture as its contributors, and presumes its readers to be persons of education.

#### *Trouvailles*

Qu'est-ce pourtant en Angleterre qu'un journaliste de profession ? moins qu'un chien, à moins qu'il n'appartienne à la rédaction redoutée du *Times*. Mais le *Times* n'est plus un journal : il s'élève à la hauteur d'une institution.

FRANCIS WEX, *Les Anglais Chez Eux* (1857)

Nov. 26 Found this letter from George Lyttelton waiting for Sunday. me last night :

*Walpole House*  
Eton

Nov. 24, 1944

DEAR JAMES AGATE,

Further to my recent letter. I hope it wasn't *all* about misprints ! I believe you look on me as one of those "poring persons" upon whom the Dr poured such contempt, a sort of inferior Mr Casaubon. How pleasant it is to feel that one of one's correspondents is quite certain to have read *Middlemarch*!

I had a delightful lunch recently with Plum Warner and the great C. B. Fry, both of whom spoke warmly of you. Plum is bringing out a class-list of the best twenty-five cricketers in each department of the game during the last fifty years, and for the last few names in each lot no scales seem fine enough—as you will see when I tell you that the last place among the batsmen lies between Hayward, Hendren, and Leyland. C. B. F. prefers Gunn to Shrewsbury. Do you know a queer fact about Shrewsbury?—that no one ever saw him naked ? I don't think that will be in Plum's book.

I hope you are going strong. I seem to detect in the *Sunday*

*Times* increasing impatience with the stupidity of mankind, but that is not necessarily a sign of senility.

Yours ever,

GEORGE LYTTELTON

P.S. I hope you don't put me in the pillory if the Dr really said "poring fellow." My Boswell is in Suffolk: the flying bombs pass over it most nights from the North Sea (or German Ocean).

I am replying :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*

Nov. 26, 44

DEAR GEORGE LYTTELTON,

I think I have now gone some way towards finding a philosophy of misprints: this is to be as much amused as irritated by them. Somebody the other day sent me Clement Scott's *Some Notable Hamlets*. According to this, C. S. thought that Hamlet denied augury, and that he ended that lovely speech with "Let it be." I feel I'm not at all sure that this was a printer's error. But 'tis not in mortals to command perfect accuracy. Only a morning or so ago I read in a *Times* leading article a reference to Joseph Surface saying, "What! is Morality dumb too?" I can imagine the author rubbing his eyes the next day and saying, "Charles Surface, by all that's damnable!" Too late, alas, for there in cold print was the hideous, momentary slip.

By the way, you were wrong in thinking that I have read *Middlemarch*. I remember Filson Young once saying it was the finest novel in the language. Leo Pavia goes further and declares it to be one of the most profound works of fiction in all literature. And now you! Nevertheless I shall never open it: I have read all the George Eliot I want, thank you. I belong to the school of George Moore; and he, you remember, held that G. E. ought to have been a policeman!

But I suppose all of us have our gaps. Indeed, it is a pet theory of mine that if you were to take a dinner-party of twenty highly cultured people—say Aldous Huxley, Osbert Sitwell, Raymond Mortimer, Eddie Marsh, Clifford Bax, and so on—and each was to confess to a masterpiece he had not read, one would have the nucleus of a first-class library. Here is the list which, with *Middlemarch*, would form my nucleus: *Don Quixote*, *War and Peace*, *Werther*, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Persuasion*, *Barnaby Rudge*, *The Virginians*, *Les Misérables*, *Edwin Drood*, *Fathers and Sons*, *Harry Richmond*, *Clayhanger*, *The Forsyte Saga*, *The Good*

*Companions, Farewell to Arms, Ulysses, To the Lighthouse, A Passage to India.* The difference between me and the young people of to-day is that I haven't read these books but know what they are about, whereas they haven't and don't.

And then there are the authors I cannot claim to have more than dipped into : Richardson, Smollett, Disraeli, Gissing, Lever, Trollope, Ouida, Borrow, Peacock, Hawthorne, Henry James, Stendhal, Proust. I am never quite sure whether Romain Rolland is an author or a title, and as for people with names like Ludwig, Zweig, Werfel, and Feuchtwanger, I lump them all together as an unreadable, indigestible mass. I tell you, my dear fellow, that I'm a highly uneducated person. Do you wonder how I square all this with my job as " literary critic " ? I don't. I don't pretend to be a literary critic. My attitude is strictly Mr Wemmick's : " Here's a book ! Let's dip into it ! "

Ever,  
JAMES AGATE

P.S. It hadn't occurred to me that anybody would want to see Shrewsbury naked !

Nov. 27 Delivered a talk to the Unity Theatre. Title : " Half Monday. an Hour of Prattle." Took care that it should be the best prattle. All very pleasant and lively, with some good heckling. The most intelligent audience I have ever addressed. Discovered that while Bloomsbury doesn't wash, King's Cross does.

Nov. 28 The *Manchester Guardian* on *Noblesse Oblige*, published to-day :

#### ART AND WAR

A little time ago Sir Osbert Sitwell wrote *A Letter to My Son*, which contained many true and perceptive things about art and life. Its chief message, however, that the artist should be exempt from the obligations of citizenship (including conscription), was surely wrong. Now Mr James Agate has replied with *Another Letter to Another Son*, which contains some rash statements about life and art but the main argument of which is surely right. As Mr Agate puts it (after a brilliant round in which he uses every club in his classical bag), " it is the duty of the artist to fight for the Walworth Road, however low its taste, as manfully and resolutely as

the Walworth Road fights for—Heaven forgive me—its betters.” It is an old dispute and an important one, but there can be no doubt who is in the right. The idea that the artist is some one apart from the common man is one which arises naturally in societies where art has become divorced from the common man. In ancient Athens, where the appreciation of great art was as general as the taste for beer in this country, no one questioned the law which made Aeschylus a soldier and Sophocles a general. Thucydides could record his own failure to relieve Amphipolis in passionless prose because he knew, like Mr Agate and Dr Johnson, “that words are the daughters of earth and that things are the sons of heaven.” In the perspective of his history art and war were but equal influences in the development of man. The conflict between the artist and his times cannot be resolved by the State but only by the artist himself. And to do that he must share the miseries of mankind as well as the splendours.

Nov. 29      Letter from my very old and very dear friend  
Wednesday. Devas Jones, for a short time my Commanding  
Officer in the last war, and now looking after war  
prisoners :

360, *Prisoner of War Camp*  
EAST AFRICA COMMAND  
*From A. W. Devas Jones*  
*Major*

*Sunday*  
*5th Novem. 1944*

*To James Agate*  
*Captain*

MY DEAR JIMMIE,

I have just received a letter from a bloke named Christopher Verden, once a subaltern under my benign command. He told me before he was sent back to England, unfit, that he was once under canvas with you in France in 1915 or '16. In his letter he says he met you in October last and you asked for my address !!! God stiffen the crows ! (as my sergeant-major always says) I have written to you during the last five years at least a dozen times “with never a sign or a look, dear, to remind me of thee, of thee,” as my earlier loves used to bleat.

I suppose that as I don't know your postal address and as I have sent 'em to the Savage Club, *Sunday Times*, *Daily Express* and so on, my priceless heartburnings either were blitzed *en route* or remain uncollected. My main fear is that they were opened by your secretary (God again stiffen the

crows !), Leo Pavia (who surely doesn't remember me, thank God), who, probably rightly, thought 'em unworthy to hand on to you. But you see I persevere.

It would be good to see you soon again, old horse, but I'm afraid that isn't likely. I'm 68 next January and feel 86. I'm determined to hang on until this job is finished unless they bowlerise me, but strange to relate they seem to think I'm still fairly *compos mentis*.

My breakfast in the mess this Sunday morning was pine-apple (none of your damned tinned stuff), ham (as good as York ever produced), eggs laid yesterday, toast, and tons of butter and marmalade. No wonder I now weigh 14 stone 10 lb.

Give my love to Noel Coward when next you see him. I had a yarn about you with him when he was in Nairobi earlier this year. Also to Jock when you see that delightful fellow.

Kiva heri, old son,  
Yours aye,  
DEVAS

Whereupon I wrote :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*  
*November 29th, '44*

DEAR DEVAS,

Ten years or thereabouts, isn't it, since we met ? But I have never forgotten you. There is even a reference to you in *Ego 3*.

Do you still spend your time between lion-taming and lady-killing ? And are there any ladies in Nairobi, or wherever it is, to kill ?

I have many memories of you, and all of them happy ones. I remember that dove-coloured uniform of yours, suitable for Arlésienne-slaying, which you tried to persuade some inspecting General was khaki. I remember your chivalrous attitude to "Spot White," the only courtesan I ever met who had the Dumasian quality. I remember your driving me at breakneck speed over the wretched road from Arles to Cete in a Studebaker held together with string. I remember going with you that night to see Isidore de Lara's *Nail* or some such name. I remember going to the opera with you in the Arena at Nimes, a velvet night and warm, balmy air—Massenet's *Hérodiade*. There was a splash of red on the grey stone walls that I imagined was some gladiator's blood. I think of you in the insurance business after the last war and living at Westcliff. Do you remember that evening at the local when two gents

challenged us to a game of bridge, lost, and didn't pay? I think of you as the centre of innumerable love-affairs, all starting with the same gallantry and all ending with the same ruefulness. I see in you a remarkable combination of Lohengrin and any *bon viveur* in Offenbach, with a dash of Mr Micawber. Well, how do you like Port Middlebay?

I don't know how many of my *Ego* books you have seen and got. Let me know, and I will do whatever is possible to get the others to you. Meanwhile here is a photograph of your old friend as, I hope, you remember him.

Ever,  
JIMMIE

P.S. Have started fifty letters to you and never finished one.

Injuries to the living are one thing; injuries to the dead are another. Looking through some papers, I find to my horror and dismay that in *Ego* 6, in the entry for Saturday, June 5, 1943, I unwittingly, though perhaps carelessly, libelled Leslie Howard. Here is the passage, which I repeat in order to give full value to my retraction:

His Hamlet I did not see; but I remember that at one time he contemplated making a film version of the play. I still have the account of an interview given by him at the time. Asked why he cut the scene on the ramparts, he replied, "I think it's a good idea to start *Hamlet* off on a rather brilliant and noisy note, instead of in the quiet undertone of the sentries' conversation, so we begin with the second scene, inside the castle." He told the interviewer of his intention to discard "Come, bird, come!", Hamlet's swearing of his friends to secrecy, the "fellow in the cellarage" passage, "Well said, old mole!", "There are more things in heaven and earth," the intimation about the antic disposition, the "Rest, rest, perturbèd spirit!"

I based this entry upon an article I wrote in the *Tatler* in 1936. To-day I came across a letter which Leslie wrote to me about the article. Here it is:

I know it is silly for an actor to answer back at his critics, but as you have done me, I am sure quite unwittingly, an injustice in your article in the current *Tatler*, I hope I may be allowed these words.

I am sorry you did not guess that I was hopelessly misquoted by the good lady in the interview in question (which I

neither sought nor wanted), and I'm certain you would be the first to grant that the most stupid actor could not really be quite as stupid as the average interview paints him. I thought this was common knowledge. (Have you ever glanced at some of the "fan" magazines?) I am heart-broken that you could have thought me capable of some of the revolting remarks that were put into my mouth.

The statements concerning *Hamlet* are fantastically inaccurate, and that you should have given these falsities prominence without verification seems to me cruel without being kind.

If I could show you our script you would see that *the first rampart scene stands intact*, while *every one* of the famous lines, at the alleged cutting of which you are properly horrified, *stands in its place in black and white*. The young lady interviewer was certainly a little careless in her hurried glance at the MS. The majority of your article is, therefore, based upon the false premise of my vandalism on this play.

Now be a sport about this—I think you've made a mistake!

I am desperately ashamed and sorry that I forgot having received this letter.

*Nov. 30 Thursday* Here is the result of four days' agonising labour about the *Henry V* film. I would remark here that while there is an art of writing on a threepenny bit there is also an art of reading such writing.

#### FROM THE THEATRE ANGLE

He goes but to see a noise that he heard. . . .  
*A Midsummer Night's Dream*

No. I do not believe that you can take a lot of Home Guards, dress them up in chain-mail knitted out of wool and sprayed with gold or aluminium paint (real armour would be no better), set them on a lot of horses, turn a handle, and blandly announce *Henry V*.

What is the object of a Shakespeare film? Is it to popularise Shakespeare? But with me he is already popular. Or to popularise our national poet with a public of which 95 per cent. has never seen a Shakespeare play, and 5 per cent. the inside of a theatre? First let us consider the matter of seating capacity. If every seat in every theatre in the United Kingdom were taken for every performance throughout the year the maximum number of playgoers that could be accommodated

is under 100 millions. Yet according to the figures published in 1921 by the Parliamentary Commission on the Cinema, the number of persons who visited the films in the previous year was 1078 millions ! (To-day increased, I suggest, to 3000 millions.) Seeing that all these non-playgoers have taken to the films like Donald Ducks to water, why not, runs the simple-seeming argument, use the films as a means of getting Shakespeare to the people ? And I say : Not so fast. Are we sure that what is ultimately got over to the cinema audience will be Shakespeare ? Or will it be something else ? Chorus, you remember, says in this play :

Still be kind,  
And eke out our performance with your mind.

But is the film public possessed of the kind of mind which is necessary to eke out a Shakespearean performance ? "Sir," said Dr Johnson, "if you talk of *Cecilia* talk on." The reverse is, I fancy, the attitude of the filmgoer in the matter of *Henry V*. "Cut the cackle and come to the 'osses'" is the unspoken demand here. In this connection the reader might like to be reminded of that dinner-party in which Saki's Stephen Thorle, recounting his slum experiences, said : "The gratitude of those poor creatures when I presented them with a set of table crockery apiece, the tears in their eyes and their voices when they thanked me, would be impossible to describe." And how Comus Bassington replied : "Thank you all the same for describing it." I do not think the filmgoer will thank Shakespeare for his descriptions of the joys of battle or the worries of kingship, unnecessary verbiage keeping him from the 'osses.

As a Shakespearean I care nothing for these battle-orgies. They are magnificent, and they are undoubtedly war. But they are not Shakespeare, who neither enacts the Battle of Agincourt nor describes it. He takes the playgoer straight from

Now, soldiers, march away :  
And how thou pleasest, God, dispose the day !

to the Constable's "O diable !" and Orleans's "O seigneur ! le jour est perdu." Unless we count the comic episode with Pistol and his French prisoner there is nothing to show how the English came to win and the French to lose the day. As a Shakespearean I no more want interpolated cavalry charges in this great play than I want to see seascapes and naval fights in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Shakespeare put all of the Battle of

Actium that matters dramatically into four and a half lines :

She once being loof'd,  
The noble ruin of her magic, Antony,  
Claps on his sea-wing, and like a doting mallard,  
Leaving the flight in height, flies after her :  
I never saw an action of such shame.

I refuse to believe that model ships careering about in a tin bath, or even two actual-size, carefully reconstructed fleets manued by sailors bronzed by Blackpool's sun and wind, shaking out topgallants and swearing good, round Latin and Egyptian oaths, are going to add anything to those four and a half tragic lines. Or that Hamlet's "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio," would be enhanced by sequences depicting Halley's comet and San Francisco's earthquake. For me these actualities defeat their purpose. When Olivier stood up in his stirrups with sword upraised waiting to give the signal to the attent bowmen, I thought not of Shakespeare's Henry but of some modern conductor with baton poised ready to start the din in "*Heldenleben*." And fell into contemplation of an essay which should be called "*Sir Thomas and the Aldershot Tattoo*."

All the early part struck me as enchanting. But when the film flew, so to speak, out of window, Shakespeare, as far as I was concerned, walked out of door. The maker of any Shakespeare picture must, in my opinion, choose between photographing the acted play, as the first half of this film does, and taking the camera out of doors and shooting the *raw material* of the drama as the secoud half of this picture does. If the first choice is made then I see no harm in enlarging the scope of the film to include shots of the London of 1600 and the audience at the Globe Theatre. If the second choice be preferred then let us be allowed to *forget the playhouse altogether* and open with that "antechamber in the King's palace" furnished as it conjecturally was in 1415. And after that to France, at the risk of mistaking Agincourt for Sunningdale or St Andrews! "The centuries kiss and commingle." But I won't have them mingling; the result can only be a jumble of planes. Which is fatal. Only by strict choice and adherence, by knowing its mind and sticking to it, can the screen hope to technicolour the lily and re-gild Shakespeare's gold.

The acting? As a critic of the theatre I must praise Olivier for a superb performance throughout and in particular for that *geniality* which makes "A little touch of Harry in the

night " credible in connection with Shakespeare's cold, calculating prig. (How many filmgoers—or playgoers for that matter—ever give full value to the infamous soliloquy in *Henry IV*, Part 1, about imitating the sun hiding behind base contagious clouds ? How W. S. came to write this knavish, political stuff I don't know. A little touch of Francis in the script ?) As a dramatic critic who has strayed into the cinema I must award the palm to that steed (White Surrey's progenitor ?) from whose back Henry orates. This animal has perfectly realised that

In films there's nothing so becomes a horse  
As modest stillness and humility.

For here Henry's mount kept very, very still, though it was lively enough later on. Which means that I, even I, have cut Shakespeare's cackle and come to the 'oss.

*Dec. 2* Annual Dinner (now Luncheon) at the Savage Club.  
*Saturday.* Victor MacClure was in the chair, and the guests of honour were Air Chief Marshal Sir William Sholto Douglas, and Walter de la Mare. (We have a genius for playing up opposites.) Wonderful programme. Mark gave the Haydn F minor Variations beautifully, following them up with the rowdiest Country Dance I have ever heard. Alec Whittaker produced some of his loveliest oboe tone. Dennis Noble in great voice with the "Credo" from *Otello*. Sorry, but I am not taken in by this Demon King stuff any more than I am by Liszt's. The truth is that Verdi was an incorrigible Italian, and could not help linking one abyss with another with a fillet of tinkle which might have come out of *Traviata*. It fell to me at the end to deliver something in the nature of an Epilogue. Reminding the Club that to-morrow is the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Stevenson, I read them this extract from *The Wrecker* :

I believe, if things had gone smooth with me, I should be now fallen in mind to a thing perhaps as low as many types of bourgeois—the implicit or exclusive artist. The dull man is made, not by the nature, but by the degree of his immersion in a single business. And all the more if that be sedentary, uneventful, and ingloriously safe. More than half of him will then remain unexercised and undeveloped; the rest will be distended and deformed by over-nutrition, over-cerebration, and

the heat of rooms. I have often marvelled at the impudence of gentlemen who describe and pass judgment on the life of man, in almost perfect ignorance of all its necessary elements and natural carccrs. Those who dwell in clubs and studios may paint excellent pictures or write enchanting novels. There is one thing that they should not do : they should pass no judgment on man's destiny, for it is a thing with which they are unacquainted. Their own life is an exerescence of the moment, doomed, in the vicissitude of history, to pass and disappear. The eternal life of man, spent under sun and rain and in rude physical effort, lies upon one side, scarce changed since the beginning.

It is proper from time to time that the artist should be reminded of his place. I cannot and will not see that the stay-at-home exquisite who writes a poem about the ecstasies of dive-bombing is a better fellow than the hero whose epitaph is : One of our aircraft did not return.

*Dec. 3      A letter :*

*Sunday.*

DEAR YOUNG LADY,

You write :

"I saw Sarah Bernhardt when I was a tot and she was past her best. I have seen Miss X at the height of her powers, at a time when I was old and experienced enough to appreciate her. Therefore, to me, Miss X is the better actress." But what have you got to do with it ? You might as well say that because you saw Everest when you were a baby and Mont Blanc when you were grown-up, the Swiss mountain is the higher ! In the judgment of people who saw both Bernhardt and Miss X at their best, Miss X, though quite a good performer, is the lesser actress.

Let me quote you a passage from the Preface to a book about Paris which George Augustus Sala wrote some time in the sixties : "One word in conclusion, to explain why I made public so ostensibly uninteresting a fact that I was fifty last November. I drew attention to the circumstance as a justification of my presuming to write anything about Paris, and to show that I was to some extent qualified to write about it. I have known the French capital intimately for forty years." I have known the English theatre for close on sixty years. It may interest you to know that when I joined the *Saturday Review* in 1921 I was in my forty-fifth year, and had spent

thirty-six years studying the theatre for myself and weighing up what my elders told me about it.

In conclusion, I beg you to ponder again Sala's words : " To show that I was qualified to write about it." What qualifications has any young person ? A child of six is entitled to say that in her scale of values *Cinderella* is a better play than *Hamlet*. What has her scale of values to do with it ? The business of young people is to *learn*, which in no way prevents them from giving their private circle the benefit of their worthless opinions. You are perfectly entitled to tell your young friends that in your opinion Miss X is a better actress than Bernhardt, and that Smith, Jones, and Robinson are all greater actors than Irving. But when you put that nonsense into words and send the words to me in the form of a letter, why then I am compelled to tell you, Madam, in good Johnsonian English, that you are a fool.

Yours sincerely,  
JAMES AGATE

*Dec. 4* Letter from the Professor of Moral Philosophy at the *Monday*. University of St Andrews. He asks why the six volumes of *Ego* "should have given such abundant pleasure to one who knows and cares nothing about the theatre, who can distinguish a horse from an elephant only because he has a partiality for elephants, who has never played golf and is bored by cricket, and who confesses (though with shame) that he has never read Balzac." Modesty prevents me from quoting his answer, with the exception of the sentence : "The diary reveals James Agate as a lovable human being whatever the entrancing Mr L. Pavia may say." I declaim this to Leo, and go on to express my gratification that a professor of moral philosophy should possess all six volumes of *Ego*. Leo grunts and says, "Why not ? I daresay Lewis Carroll would have loved them. *All these professors lead a double life !*"

Thus fortified, I open a letter from Jock, who writes to say that in the matter of the *Henry V* film the overwhelming mass of informed criticism is against me. Whereupon I proceed to deliver a right and left as follows :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*  
*December 4th, 1944*

DEAR JOCK,

Did you ever go with me to the Ring in Blackfriars ? If so

you may remember the pub opposite. It had a snack-bar in which hung a remarkable picture. This was an oil painting of a caged lion. The landlord had removed the painted bars and substituted real ones containing chicken-bones off which the lion was supposed to have dined. Your film is exactly like that. Fashions in art may and do change ; one of them —surrealism—has come and is already going. But fundamental principles are unchanging and everlasting. The first of these is that a work of art must be consistent with itself, choose its plane, and stay there. Not principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall gainsay this.

You cannot have Chorus first regretting that he cannot produce “the very casques that did affright the air at Agincourt,” and then producing them. You cannot just add the thing described to the description and enjoy the sum of both. Or would you have Othello deliver his speech to the Senate followed by a sequence of all those moving accidents by flood and field ? Would you have Octavius Cæsar remind Antony that at Modena he drank the stale of horses and then show him doing it ? Or follow Enobarbus’s barge speech with an Alma-Tadema-ish view of the same ? Or switch from Friar Laurence to Mantua and show the Mantuanas bringing out their dead ? Go to ! A play’s a play and a film’s a film, and there’s an end on’t.

To fall into the Amanda Ros vein, I am surprised that you can think that the mighty cannon of my argument is puncturable by the puny grapeshot of contemporary film criticism. Do you quote *The Times* at me ? Very well, I will quote *The Times* at you : “Miss Renée Ascherson, as Katharine, matches Mr Olivier’s intelligence with a subdued coquettishness which makes the final scene perhaps the best of all.” What would be thought of a stage production of *Henry V* in which the most effective thing was Henry and Katharine carrying on, as Edward would have said, like twittermice ? No, Jock, I wired you after the performance that Olivier, or you, or somebody, had done an impermissible thing, and done it brilliantly. There is one line of argument open to you. This is the sociological line that it is better the mob should have bastard Shakespeare than none at all. But let us not confuse this with the suggestion that bastard Shakespeare is Shakespeare. A sofa is not a bed because you can sleep on it. A film is not Shakespeare because it entertains an audience.

Tell me, Jock, when the film was first mooted did you and Larry, realising that this was the first English filming of Shakespeare (not counting the Bergner), have a grand

pow-wow on the subject of first principles ? Or did you just dash into the thing with the notion that it would be " rather fun " to do half of it indoors and half in the open air ? My guess—and I am writing like Brother Mycroft, except that he never guesses—is that first principles were never considered at all.

Here is the crux of the whole matter. Because film audiences know nothing about planes and wouldn't notice anything odd if you inserted half an hour of the Battle of Trafalgar into a film of a Jane Austen novel—presumably her naval officers fought somebody, somewhere, some time—am I to agree to your picture being made in the way it has been made rather than not at all ? This raises the whole of Ivor Brown's " theatre and life " business. If it is better for the mass to have bastard Shakespeare than no Shakespeare, then I must hold that " I'm always chasing rainbows," sung to the second subject of the Fantaisie Impromptu, is better than no Chopin. I don't say that Shakespeare's plays should not be screened, and I have pointed out two ways in which they can be screened. Having adopted one of these two legitimate ways, it then becomes lawful to lead the public to the Shakespearean well and see whether it will drink. But I insist that that well be Shakespeare's and nobody else's. I will have nothing to do with compromise. *Que je practise ? Jamais, jamais !*

Ever your

JAMIE

Dec. 5 Letter from George Lyttelton :

Tuesday.

*Walpole House  
Eton College  
Windsor*

Dec. 4, 1944

DEAR JAMES AGATE,

I should like to say firmly that you must read *Middlemarch*, but (a) I know you won't and (b) I have long given up forcing any book down anyone's throat. I share your ignorance of quite a number of those masterpieces. Some of them I have tried and just cannot manage—like *The Virginians* and *To the Lighthouse*. Others are among my favourites ! Did anyone except old Saintsbury enjoy everything ? I once (*at 13*) heard Mr Gladstone reprove a downright critic by saying he had never in his life heard a sermon from which he had not been able to extract some good. I am sure he thought he was speaking the truth. How overpraise does put one off ! I find the extravagant eulogies of Jane Austen that are so fashion-

able to-day very wearisome. And they sharpen one's desire to pick holes, and one's power to see them—probably far beyond what is just. George Moore—did you know him? If so, please tell one exactly *how* dreadful he was as a man. Was he as catty, as jealous, as disloyal to his friends as he appeared? I always enjoyed *Hail and Farewell* enormously, but wilted before *The Brook Kerith* and some of the later ones.

This may amuse you. Some years ago the parish magazine here called Mrs Woodhouse (an Eton dignitary) "Mrs Bloodhouse," and did not much mend the matter by its apology the month after to "Mrs Woodlouse"! And I have *not* invented that!

Yours ever,  
GEORGE LYTTELTON

I am replying :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*  
*Dec. 5th, 1944*

DEAR GEORGE LYTTELTON,

First about George Moore. I lunched to-day with Viola Garvin, who lived next door to him in Ebury Street for three years. She told me—these are her exact words—that he was "chivalrous, kind, Irish, and excessively naughty. He had a beautiful mind, and the part of it that was dirty was just schoolboy-dirt." He once told her that Humbold Wolfe—which was what G. M. always called Humbert—was the ideal lover for a woman. "Love has gone out since the advent of the telephone. Love was at its best in the days of the Crusades, when your man was away. Now Humbold is always going to Geneva."

Have been very busy with the *Henry V* film. About this the best thing is something I overheard in the foyer as we were coming out, said by some film magnate quite seriously : "It ought to pull 'em in, of course. It all depends on whether they can stick the lingo." Incidentally, I have just received a letter from a gentleman suggesting that in my spare time I might like to translate all Shakespeare's plays into twentieth-century English!

All quiet on the misprint front. Except that the proof of an article has just arrived in which Pavia, who took the stuff down, makes me refer to Amelia praying for George Osborne lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart, on the field of Trafalgar!

Ever,  
JAMES AGATE

P.S. You haven't told me why you're still at Eton. I

1944]

EGO 7

understood that you were going to retire and live in a fen or moat somewhere in Suffolk.

*Dec. 6* A lady has sent me a number of old theatre programmes. I pick up one at random and read :  
“The Comedy Theatre, 19th November, 1896. *A White Elephant*, comedy by R. C. Carton.” The cast includes Charles Hawtrey, Eric Lewis, Henry Kemble, Miss Compton, Mrs Charles Calvert, Nina Boucicault, and Lottie Venne. I suppose the young woman who holds Miss X to be a better actress than Sarah imagines one can walk into any London theatre to-night and see a cast as good as this. There are one or two theatres, say the Haymarket or the New, where this might be possible. To which the answer is that the Haymarket and the New are leading and extraordinary theatres, whereas the Comedy in the nineties was a place of no particular importance. Good acting in London to-day is an exception ; in the nineties it happened all over the place.

*Dec. 7* Letter from Neville Cardus :  
*Thursday.*

35 West End  
Crick Avenue  
Potts Point  
Sydney  
Nov. 27, 1944

MY DEAR JAMES,

That you should write to me 14,000 miles and describe my book as “entrancing” is profoundly satisfying. I am amazed at the wonder of life : for consider . . . In Manchester, thirty-seven years ago, a poor threadbare boy read a dramatic criticism signed “J. E. A.” in the *Manchester Guardian* : it was a notice of Manchester’s first production of *Peter Pan*. I read it in a public library in Stockport Road : I’m not sure that it wasn’t Boxing Day. The notice fascinated me, and I began to look for your initials. I remember a notice by you in the *Daily Dispatch*—and it contained the word “hyper-gelast” ; you were quoting George Meredith—aye, in the *Daily Dispatch*. And here we are—1944—and this note is being written in the blazing sunshine of Australia to the same J. E. A. somewhere in the dear chill of London—written by the same Cardus who (probably half starved and cold but not noticing it) discovered, in a Free Library, a coming dramatic

critic. Blessings on you—and on Pavia, who is superb in *Ego 6*—the best volume since the first. On Christmas Day I shall drink to both of you.

Ever,  
NEVILLE

At once sent this :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*  
*Dec. 7th, 1944*

MY DEAR NEVILLE,

But your book is entrancing ! So why not say so ? As for that trifle of 14,000 miles, I could write you at double the distance. If I had my way letter-writing would be forbidden except between hemispheres ; it would save such a lot of trouble.

Yes, I remember using the word " hypergelast," and how proud I was of it. The world was more educated when I was a boy. If a writer in a popular paper wanted to use an unfamiliar word his editor let him, trusting to his more ignorant, or less learned, readers to turn to the dictionary and find out the meaning. I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of papers in England to-day who would pass that word without a footnote. One of them is the *Sunday Times*, and I promise to use the word or some form of it on the very next Sunday as ever is. It will fit capitally into a piece of prose I am doing and to which I am giving extra special care. This is partly to do honour to our new comedian Sid Field, and partly to prove to readers that though sixty-seven winters have besieged this brow there's life in the old dog yet.

I hope you will get this in time for Christmas Day. Know that, if the gods are propitious, Pavia and I will raise a glass to you.

Ever,  
JAMES

*Dec. 8*      Here is what I propose for Sunday :  
*Friday.*

#### A GREAT COMEDIAN

What a piece of work is a clown ! how noble in unreason ! in misapprehension how like a god ! If Sid Field, the bright particular star of *Strike It Again* at the Prince of Wales's Theatre, is not the beauty of the world he is the paragon of his kind. Do I detect a way in which this droll differs from

other drolls ? Let us turn to Elia for a moment ; it never does to neglect Elia : " There is one face of Farley, one face of Knight, one (but what a one it is !) of Liston ; but Munden has none that you can properly pin down, and call *his*." There is one face of Askey, one face of Trinder, one (but what a one it is !) of Monsewer Gray ; but Field has none that you can isolate, as the chemists have it.

It is a commonplace of French actors that they all look alike. Whereas your English comedians specialise in individuality ; they like to be recognisable a mile off. Field is different. His mask, in which there is no telling where the eyes end and the nose begins, puts one in mind of those mystery ships which do not reveal their secret until they go into action. Yet if one must describe the nondescript—this mug, this " dial," as the Cockney has it—one might say that it is expressive of that sense of humour which brings together Shakespeare's Pistols, Bardolphs, and Nyms, Kipling's Mulvanneys, Learoyds, and Ortherises, Bairnsfather's Old Bills, Alfs, and Berts, and the boys of the present war. One might, taking one's illustrations from the theatre, talk of an admixture of the moonstruck clodhoppery of Jay Laurier, the wide-awake cithood of George Carney, the surrender to amazement of Ralph Richardson—like Bottom the Weaver, Field knows what it is to be " translated." Within these three walls—you can add a fourth and call it Tom—he is a master of an astonishing range of expression—the perkiness of the street-arab, the " Bragian impudence " which Mrs Gamp found so obnoxious, the whole armoury of leer and innuendo from Hogarth to Ally Sloper. Field is all the corner boys of Cockaigne. The genius of Grock, said Walkley, was " genial and *macabre*, owlishly stupid and Macchiavellianly astute, platypode and feather-light, cacophonous and divinely musical." (What Grock would have made of this I don't know. I can hear as well as see the Field reaction to platypode and cacophonous : " Platty—who ? Caca—what ?") Walkley then went on to describe how Grock's first act was " a practical antithesis." And the rest of a brilliant article was bejewelled with the names of Croce, Victor Hugo, Jean-Paul Richter, Sainte-Beuve, and of course Aristotle. " What a performance ! "

There have been comedians who, deprived of their gadgets and their " props," would be quite unfunny. Field has no need of Little Tich's long boots, Tate's moustache, Billy Bennett's deplorable dress suit, the Robeyesque eyebrows, the Gravesian proboscis. It may be true that he has not quite the stature of these supreme artists, seeing that as yet he lacks what that good dramatic critic Hamlet would have called their

"large discourse." But let it be conceded that he can do with fewer adventitious aids, that his spirit shines through him, not through his paraphernalia. Take that over-long, over-waisted, over-padded overcoat, Lambeth's peacockery and panache. This is funny, but the man inside it is funnier still. Or take that scene at the fashionable photographer's. Does our comedian fall over the camera-legs or get entangled in the business of focusing? No, what is funny here is the whole ambience and ambiguity of the photographic *séance à la mode*. Have artist and subject got together for the mere encompassing of a negative? No, their business is the more positive one of tea and gossip; the plate is one that holds buns.

Or consider the scene in which our subject appears as a landscape painter complete with all the appurtenances of his trade. An Awful Child takes one look at the canvas and maddeningly challenges the chiaroscuro. Does Field, as lesser spirits might, demolish his easel and take to slithering about the stage on his palette? No, the come-back is intellectual. Professing to regard the brat as every mother's darling, and putting on his most winning smile—a smile calculated to woo an elephant at a hundred yards—Field opens the gate to insinuation, saying, "Why don't you go and play a nice game on the railway line?" "Nice" is the operative word here. I think I like this actor best when he is thwarted, for being nonplussed he soars to metaphysical and spiritual heights. "Get behind the ball!" orders his golf pro. And Field replies, "But it's behind the ball all round!" And again, "Let's go!" says the pro. "Where to?" asks Field. "Nowhere," says the pro. "When I say, 'Let's go!' I don't mean let's go, I mean 'Let's go!'" The look on Field's face makes you realise that there are moments when exasperation attains to the ecstasy of the saints.

But there, I realise that it is no use. Like Walkley I see "that these tricks, which in action send one into convulsions of laughter, are not ludicrous, are not to be realised at all in narrative. It is the old difficulty of transposing the comic from three dimensions into two—and when the comic becomes the grotesque, and that extreme form of the grotesque which constitutes the clownesque, then the difficulty becomes sheer impossibility." And here I must leave a comedian who is great in the Victorian acceptance of the word. Great because of the power to kindle the most frozen of audiences with a look. Instantaneous the transition from the gelid to the gelastic. "Vernon! What kind of jelly? What sort of elastic? Cool!"

1944]

EGO 7

Dec. 9            Again from George Lyttelton :  
Saturday.

Walpole House  
Eton

Dec. 8, 1944

DEAR JAMES AGATE,

I read *Noblesse Oblige* in bed last night with the greatest pleasure. Sitwell's contempt for the ordinary man's tastes and pleasures is not airy like Horace Walpole's, or Olympic like Milton's, or bluff like Johnson's, but testy and supercilious. That is fundamentally an awfully silly passage that you quote —coming soon after that superb piece about that great bowler Richardson, who, when I was at school, was my chosen hero. Is it true that he did not in fact stand dazed at the crease after all was over, but led the rush to the bar, and was half-way through his pint before the rest arrived ?

But don't you put the case a bit over-strongly, ignoring the danger of the common man imposing *his* tastes on every one else ? Do you really approve so wholeheartedly of your captain of industry on page 26 ? The Press to-day is all for the common man and his standards, and I *have* read some sharp strictures by James Agate on the drivel he is forced to see and hear in the theatre and cinema !

You are—as always—very good reading, and I cannot see how anyone could combat your main thesis—viz., that artists mustn't be *coddled*. Two more questions. Would you really give your putative son *Jonathan Wild* on his fifteenth birthday ? Isn't it a couple of years too early for Miss Tishy ? And (as you *have* cast me for the part of Mr Casaubon) shouldn't "sixty" in line 7 on page 27 be "fifty" ? That is how one's mind works after correcting mistakes for thirty-six years.

I am carrying on here as a non-house master for a few terms till the young men begin to return. My wife and family meanwhile live in Suffolk, where flying bombs pass over the house on their way to London. I only hope some officious and efficient A.A. gun won't drop one ten miles from the coast.

That is very interesting about George Moore. The naughtiness rather ousts the chivalry in *Hail and Farewell*—e.g., about Yeats. I expect he showed at his best to intelligent women —like many other men. And by the way, what an extraordinarily distinguished mind Montague (C. E.) had. That bit you quote in *Noblesse Oblige* makes one reader feel thoroughly shallow-minded and cheap. Is he always as good as that ?

I must stop. Your letters make me run on, and you are

busy ("Sir, my being so good is no reason why you should be so ill.") I shall read *N. O.* to my boys, and years hence some distinguished man will tell an interviewer how in youth he had had his eyes shut and loved the garish day, etc., till one day James Agate opened them, and he was never the same again.

Yours ever,  
GEORGE LYTTELTON

The epistolary fit coming on again, I send the dear fellow this :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*  
*December 9th, 1944*

DEAR GEORGE LYTTELTON,

The first letter I opened this morning contained the following newspaper cutting :

"NEW DELHI, Friday. Bong of Wong, chieftain of one of the biggest Naga head-hunting tribes in Assam, has declared war on Japan. Reuter."

No word of the sender, but the address on the envelope is in Clifford Bax's unmistakable fist. Next I read all the rubbish, and finally came to your letter, which I had kept for dessert.

Yes, you are quite right. "Sixty" should be "fifty." I've looked up the proofs to see what occurred, and I find that I wrote originally : "somebody who died getting on for sixty years ago." I remember this striking me as inelegant and deciding that I would change it to "more than fifty years ago." I find that I half-did this, and can only think that the telephone or some other interruption happened. Anyhow, the correction has gone to the printer's and will be in time for the next edition. Thank you ! Now it is very wrong of me, and all that, but considering the beam in my own eye does not prevent me from commenting on the mote in another's. I see that in this morning's *News Chronicle* Robert Lynd, making a tremendous fuss about Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, talks about "the tapping of blind Pugh's stick." But doesn't he know the name is spelt "Pew"? There is a dew of ghastliness on those three letters which the other name entirely lacks. I must, I suppose, forgive Lynd ; but how would he like me to spell his name with an "i" instead of a "y"? However, that's enough about misprints. Do I really approve of my captain of industry? No. But I don't disapprove. I am a complete fool in, say, mending a bicycle or driving a motor-car. Why, then, should I despise a man who doesn't know trombone from tambourine and thinks that *The Murders in the*

*Rue Morgue* was written by Edgar Wallace? Re *Jonathan Wild* and fifteen-year-olds. As between Miss Tishy's petticoats and Miss Grable's legs, I prefer the former. About Richardson. Yes, of course he legged it to the pavilion quicker than anybody. I saw every ball of that last Australian innings, and my account isn't nearly so good as Cardus's in spite of the fact that he was seven years old at the time, and if he saw the match at all saw it from his nursery window seven miles away! About Montague. Yes, Montague was always as good when he was essay-writing. He never touched this level in his novels, which I have given up trying to read.

And now here's something which may amuse you. As I told you, I have half gone over to the Baconians, in spite of their absurdities. Yesterday a man sent me a book called *Shakespearian Acrostics*. Take at random from the First Folio Enobarbus's speech beginning at "To glow the delicate cheeks" down to "Her people out upon her." The reader is to note that "the first letters in these twelve lines are TAOHSA and ASTAOH. Spelling the first six letters backwards gives the word ASHOAT, which is another name for a small hog, or pig. The first letters in the next two lines are A. S. When the first letters in the next four lines, TAOH (spelt backwards), are added, we have again the word ASHOAT." Furthermore, if we take Agrippa's interruption, "O rare for Antony," followed by Enobarbus's "Her gentlewomen," we are to note that in the First Folio the only three capital letters are O, H, and G, which being rearranged spell HOG. (How about *Antony*? Being in italics, presumably he doesn't count.) Seized with the spirit of emulation, I decided to take this as model, and to reveal to posterity that the *Ego* books are the work, not of James William Shakespeare Agate but of Alan Francis Bacon Dent. Marry, how? Tropically. It occurred to me to examine that page in *Ego* in which the diary begins. This is page 159, and as I don't suppose you have it in front of you here is a copy:

## 1982

- 1 Junc 2. To-day is the day on which my review of Arnold
- 2 Bennett's *Journals* ought to have appeared in the
- 3 *Express*. Kept out because of lists of winners in Irish
- 4 Sweep for the Derby. Had considerable difficulty in getting
- 5 consent to this review on the theory that A. B. is no longer
- 6 news. Am told that Beverley Baxter said to his staff four
- 7 days after A. B.'s funeral: "Gentlemen, please understand

8 that so far as the *D.E.* is concerned Arnold Bennett is  
 9 dead." The worst of it is that B. B. was right and in his  
 10 place I should have had to do the same. But it hurts! It is  
 11 A.B.'s diaries which have prompted this one, started by the  
 12 writer in the fifty-fifth year of his age, which sounds like some-  
 13 thing on a tombstone! Am hoping this book will help to rid  
 14 me of those *idées noires* with which I am too much obsessed.  
 15 But debt worries are legitimate hell. Have begun retrench-  
 16 ing. Vacated the cottage at Beaconsfield and put up a "To  
 17 Let" board; moved to a smaller flat at £140 instead of £250  
 18 which was the rent at Palace Court; got rid of the chauffeur  
 19 and now make Alfred Lester drive as well as valet. This is  
 20 not his real name, but fits this six foot four of melancholy  
 21 fine. His previous place was ducal, which accounts for him  
 22 saying to me on his second day: "We have been looking  
 23 through our suits, sir, and find we need two more." Upon  
 24 my promising to consider the matter he said: "They are  
 25 ordered, sir. I dress my gentlemen according to their age  
 26 and shape! You will approve the patterns, sir, I feel sure."  
 27 Of course, retrenching has its difficulties. I am faced with  
 28 a big bill at Palace Court, having broken what now turns  
 29 out to be a repairing lease. Getting in to the new place has  
 30 cost £100. It is all very well selling my lovely chairs and  
 31 table, but I have had to buy something smaller to take their  
 32 place.

I begin by taking the words "James Agate" and giving to each letter its numerical value. J is the tenth letter of the alphabet, which means that its numerical value is 10. I then take the tenth line in my extract, find that it begins with the word "place," so I set down P. A is the next letter in my name. Its numerical value is 1, and since my first line begins with the word "to-day" I set down T. And so I go on through the whole name, with the result that I get the series

P T T C A      T D T N C

It springs to the eye that the first, third, fourth, and fifth letters arranged slightly differently—the Baconians are great arrangers—spell the word PACT. This leaves us with

T T D T N C

I now note that the letter C has appeared twice. Now C's value is 3, and reference to the diary shows that if in the third line I omit the italicised word *Express*—the Baconians are great omitters—I get the phrase KEPT OUT. What have we established so far? We have established that a PACT has

been made in which somebody is to be KEPT OUT. But C has a further meaning. Couple it with the letters N and D, and we get NIL DESPERANDUM. CIRCUMSPICE. Meaning that I am to go on with my search. What is left that has not been used? Three T's, which makes four in all. Why this insistence? Once more I consult my numerical table, and I find that T's value is 20. Now let me see what my twentieth line has to say. It says: "NOT HIS REAL NAME." We have now established beyond reasonable doubt the existence of a PACT whereby somebody, anxious that NOT HIS REAL NAME should appear as the author of *Ego*, arranges for it to be KEPT OUT, and that if I do not despair but go on looking I shall find out who this somebody is.

Now I take the numerical value of A. H. Dent.

A	1
H	8
D	4
E	5
N	14
T	20
<hr/>	
	52

A. H. Dent being better known as Alan Dent, which contains eight letters, and, the Baconians being great at adding, I add the figure 8:

$$\begin{array}{r}
 52 \\
 8 \\
 \hline
 60
 \end{array}$$

I then turn to the sixtieth line in *Ego*, and find that it begins with the word

J O C K

*C'est simple comme bonjour!* The gilt is slightly off the gingerbread—or better, the rind is still on the Bacon—when I tell you that I didn't stop here. That I went on to consider the possibility of Leo Pavia being the author. His initials are I. L. P.

I	9
L	12
P	16
<hr/>	
	87

But he is better known as LEO.

L	12
E	5
O	15
<hr/>	
	32

Add the two together :

37
32
<hr/>
69

After which I turn over the first sixty-eight pages of my diary, and stop at the sixty-ninth. And I find that the first line of the sixty-ninth page begins

### THIS FIEND IN TYPIST'S CLOTHING

Which can only be

LEO.

Staggeringly,

JAMES AGATE

*Dec. 10* My first reaction to the nonsense in Greece is that *Sunday*. we should withdraw and let her stew in her own juice with whatever she remembers of Byron for flavouring. To put it more elegantly, the word about E.L.A.S. and E.A.M. is Mercutio's "A plague o' both your houses!"

I have been thinking a great deal in the Shakespearean vein lately. Particularly Hamlet's

The time is out of joint : O cursèd spite,  
That ever I was born to set it right !

Why does it always fall to me to correct other people's thinking ? So far as I can see logic has very nearly left the world. Take the muddle-headedness about *Noblesse Oblige*. How can a man of George Orwell's intelligence say in his notice that "Mr Agate implies all the way through that he sympathises, or partly sympathises, with the average man's contempt for the arts" ? Here is a passage from my book :

To define the flame of ecstasy is to go back to the first principles of all art. Shortly we may allege the passionate

quest for beauty, the search for light that never was on sea or land ; the expression of all that some mysterious madness has taught the artist to be supremely worth-while setting down in word or paint or sound ; the effort to perpetuate beyond the grave and in terms of his art that consciousness of the world about him which has been said to be civilised man's "marvel and treasure." It is the love of work brought to perfection in a garret and on a crust. It is persistence in the face of neglect. Fame and applause are fuel to the vanity of the artist ; the flame of ecstasy burns a spiritual oil.

The point of *Noblesse Oblige* is that artists should fight for the ordinary man *in spite of* that lowness of taste which I, as an artist, must deplore. With this further reservation that a low standard of taste in the ordinary man is natural—you really can't expect your dustman to know the difference between a fugue and a scherzo ; Jock has just reminded me that William Archer didn't. Now a low standard of taste in people from whom a high standard cannot be expected is natural and therefore healthy, seeing that there is no pretence about it. (This is deplorable to the type of person who thinks that lorry-drivers should whistle Wagner. Leo interrupts to say that in his time Viennese navvies habitually communicated ecstasy to one another by an exultant yodelling of the Sword-motiv from the *Ring*.) Wherefore that low standard, though deplorable, cannot be contemptible. *Noblesse Oblige* brushes all nice distinctions on one side and maintains that however low the ordinary man's taste it is the business of his betters to fight for him. But Orwell doesn't, or can't, or won't see this, and argues that because I want to fight for the ordinary man I must sympathise with the ordinary man's taste. This is like saying that because I intervene to prevent a prostitute from being beaten up by her bully I must approve the wretched woman's taste in hats, opera, bedroom furniture, and everything else.

Eric Newton has a fine brain, and Heaven knows that since art criticism is not my job I don't want to put him right. But I obviously must, since nobody else looks like doing it. A great deal of ink has been spilt recently over C.E.M.A. having sent round this country a number of paintings whose authenticity some people have questioned. I have dispatched the following letter :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*

*December 10th, 1944*

DEAR ERIC NEWTON,

Come, come ! You say : " It is a queer but human weakness that attaches more importance to a horse's pedigree than to its performance."

Have you ever been a judge at a horse-show ? I have judged many horse-shows, and I can tell you that never are the judges furnished with the name or breeding of the animals brought before them. I should think that man a very poor critic of Hackneys who, until he had looked up a horse's sire and dam, didn't know whether it was going off its hocks or leaving them behind.

I don't understand you when you write : " At Wildenstein's there is a big uncouth flower-piece by Delacroix that is just forgivable, for Delacroix can afford to be uncouth. But sign the picture 'Renoir' and it would become nauseating."

You remember Mrs Gamp and her " When Gamp was summonsed to his long home, and I see him a-lying in Guy's Hospital with a penny-piece on each eye and his wooden leg under his left arm, I thought I should have fainted away. But I bore up." Are you going to tell me that this is forgivable because it is signed " Dickens " and because Dickens can afford to be uncouth, but that if it were signed " Virginia Woolf " it would be nauseating ? Go to !

Surely

daffodils,  
That come before the swallow dares, and take  
The winds of March with beauty

are good lines whoever signed them. Surely a good flower-piece is a good flower-piece whether it is signed Fantin-Latour, Van Gogh, or Ethel Walker. Surely paintings, like horses, should be judged on what Mrs Gamp would have called their " indiwiggle " merit ?

Of course I realise that in to-day's article you're not denigrating of this, your point being, as *The Times* reminds us, that " A picture does not stand by itself, it has its place in the ordered output of the mind which created it." Agreed. But I am afraid the ordinary reader will not so interpret you. He will read you as saying that one can't tell a good picture from a bad until one knows the painter. And in a way I rather sympathise with him. The ordinary playgoer doesn't care twopence as to how what Tchekov is trying to express in *The Cherry Orchard* fits in with other things he tried to express

in *The Seagull*, *Three Sisters*, and *Uncle Vanya*. And that's all I have to say.

With these reservations

I continue,  
dear mentor,  
to sit at your feet,  
as ever,

JAMES AGATE

This afternoon I experienced one of the thrills which life still affords. This is the discovery of new and real talent; since of virtuosity without the artistry to make it worth-while I have had enough. At lunch to-day Gwen Chenhalls told me that she had a box for the Cambridge Theatre, that Max Rostal was to have played the Brahms Violin Concerto, but that she'd heard he had broken his wrist and they were going to put in his place a young Palestine Jew working in a war factory. He was to play the Beethoven. So we went. The boy came on looking shy, modest, and seventeen-year-oldish (later I discovered he was twenty-one). During the long opening tutti Gwen whispered to me, "If ever a fiddler prays it's now!" The opening octaves were only so-so, but I had only to hear the beautiful cantabile of the opening theme to realise that, whatever his powers as a virtuoso, here was a potential artist of the first order. Lovely, pure tone like Heifetz. I judged his instrument to be poorish, but never did the boy try to force the tone. Quite enough technique to satisfy me, with the finale taken moderato, which is right. He seemed to hit off the one quality which sets Beethoven apart from all other composers. Bach is of the next world; Handel is of this. Beethoven contrives to be at once celestial and human. This is the note which Walt Disney of all people, inexplicably, caught in his picturisation of the Pastoral Symphony. And it was caught again this afternoon. At the end the boy, whose name is Yfrah Neaman, received a tremendous ovation, and at once it became obvious that something had to be done about it in to-morrow's paper.

I realised that it would take an old hand to work this. Any silly little bessom who doesn't know B flat from her backside, has only to croon two notes in a film and next morning the popular Press will be all over her. But to draw attention to a young musician of genuine talent is another matter. I got Gwen to

fetch the boy, and made him sit in the box while I pretended to listen to Tschaikowsky No. 6. By the middle of the third movement I had thought things out and we departed. He was a Palestinian; that was one-third of the battle. He had not been engaged in the ordinary way, but was deputising for a celebrity who had broken his wrist; that was two-thirds. He had been working at the bench in a war factory, and one could hint that he had taken off his apron to rush to the Cambridge Theatre! That, and the suggestion that the whole thing was like a film come true, would probably do the trick. Anyhow, I rushed the boy back to Grape Street, where I got him to play for Leo's benefit the Joachim cadenza to the first movement, and his own cadenza to the finale, after which I wrote a piece for the *Daily Express*, which by this time had sent a photographer. The boy left about six o'clock rather with the air of an artist to whom these things happen as a matter of right. If I read him correctly he has immense self-confidence with a perfectly assumed veneer of modesty. Which, of course, is the ideal equipment for an artist. Later, at the Café Royal, I met Mark Hambourg and told him the events of the afternoon. Mark said, "I know the young man. He was on the bill with me at some Jewish charity concert. He is a fine player and very musical."

*Dec. 11* The thing came off. The *Express* this morning *Monday* published every word I had written with a really magnificent photograph of Y. N. At the Ivy I met Hamish Hamilton, who said, "Yes, James, I read all about your fiddler, and I immediately rang up Malcolm Sargent." Nobody can make an artist; the artist must make himself. But now and again it is possible to clear away some of the difficulties and thus shorten the struggle.

*Dec. 12* Still that "cursed spite." Here is the *Times* music *Tuesday* critic on Gordon Jacob's new Symphony for Strings:

Comparisons are generally best avoided in criticism, but Jacob's and Bartók's works for the same medium invited it on this occasion since they are of similar dimensions and involve somewhat similar problems of design. Jacob's music has a certain astringency which derives in our English tradition from Purcell and Weelkes. His use of dissonance in this

symphony produced such an astringency, which for acuity does not, however, go as far in the direction of acerbity as Bartók habitually does. His slow movement is ruminative—a comparison with Vaughan Williams in this respect is not far-fetched—Bartók's is mysterious. Jacob just fails to achieve a deeply lyrical beauty in it for lack of frank melody. He writes a brooding cantilena for solo violin over sustained harmonics, but the melody of it is somehow self-cancelling. The dry flavour of the other two movements is deliberate and in keeping with the composer's general outlook.

Why waste words? Why not say straight out that the thing is very clever and all that, but doesn't contain a tune that anybody wants to listen to?

And so it goes on. Have received for review another sheaf of poems by George Barker (see *Ego* 6, p. 196). To me this is just Bartókery in words. Try as I will, I cannot find beauty in

The bride who rides the hymenal waterfall  
Spawning all possibles in her pools of surplus,  
Whom the train rapes going into a tunnel,  
The imperial multiplicator nothing can nonplus :  
My mother Nature is the origin of it all.

I don't think the day will ever come when I shall find myself murmuring :

"Whom the train rapes going into a tunnel,  
The imperial multiplicator nothing can nonplus".

in the way I find myself murmuring :

"Now slides the silent meteor on, and leaves  
A shining furrow, as thy thoughts in me."

One more quotation from Mr Barker and I have done with him. His third cycle of love-poems begins :

My tall dead wives with knives in their breasts  
Gaze at me, I am guilty, as they roll  
Like derelicts in my tempests.

So, I suppose, the late lamented George Joseph Smith might have written :

My short dead wives with sponges for their laths,<sup>1</sup>  
Gaze at me, I am guilty, as they roll  
Like derelicts in my tin baths.

<sup>1</sup> Lath. What one lathers with.

*Dec. 13* And again. Here is something from a young *Wednesday*. gentleman which challenges my view of what is and what is not poetry :

#### PICTURES FROM A BIG CITY : SATURDAY

The man in the corner  
Does things to amuse. So  
He takes off his head ;  
    Takes off his head,  
    Takes off his grinning head,  
And his arms and his legs and they  
All appear raw-beastly-red-sickening ;  
Too horrible for words, only for vomit,  
Nausea and phlegm.

But when he unbuttons  
His coat  
And his waistcoat  
I think of his entrails and go  
So that  
I  
Don't see him  
Tip his drawerful all over  
    the street  
    and the corner  
where I stood  
and watched.

F. J. BROWN

I still prefer

The splendour falls on castle walls  
to whatever was tipped by the man in the corner.

*Dec. 14* "Now let it work," said Antony. The *Telegraph*  
*Thursday*. yesterday had a sourish note re the Affaire Neaman.  
To-day I receive this from Gerald Moore :

285 *Sussex Gardens, W.2*

MY DEAR JIMMIE,

I am really startled by your article in last Monday's *Daily Express*. I have not heard Mr Neaman, but he is evidently the greatest violinist in the world ; for such praise and such space in a newspaper have never been meted out to such ordinary performers as Menuhin—who has just visited us—Heifitz or Kreisler even in the days when there was no paper shortage.

In *Ego 6*, page 88, you say "at best my musical opinions are amateurish." Possibly, therefore, you may be mistaken

in your assessment of this young man. If this is so, all this publicity and laudation may do immeasurable harm to a talented youngster in that the triumph—so easily attained—may go to his head and alter his nature. Great demands will immediately be made on him, great things expected of him which will be far beyond his reach for many years to come.

But that is not the end of this "fame in a day" episode. Consider how grossly unfair it is to the half-dozen crack violinists in this country (including the boy's teacher), to say nothing of a score of very fine fiddlers all of whom are outstripped in one bound. This is all your doing, and it is marvellous in my eyes. Were I any other fiddler, I should want to brain you!

No, I think you had a damn' good lunch before the concert and were intoxicated by the lady sitting next you. Only this can explain James Agate using such phrases as "A minute later the house was listening, hushed and rapt"—and "The suggestion of a soul sliding through liquid bliss."—Mush, my dear Jimmie.

I am taking it all with a grain of salt. I am washing it away with a nip of "liquid bliss" and a splash of soda.

Yours ever,

18. 12. '44.

GERALD MOORE

My reply :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*

*Dec. 14th, 1944*

MY DEAR GERALD,

Why not use your "loaf" ?

Don't you know anything about popular journalism ? If you did you would realise that from the point of view of the *Express* there is no grade between nonentity and world-celebrity. And then you didn't read carefully. I did not say the boy was another Heifetz. I said, "This was violin-playing in the Heifetz manner, with something of the same pure, warm tone." Then surely you as a musician should have read into the words "A performer who is a musician first and a virtuoso afterwards" a hint that the virtuosity could be improved on. About the "liquid bliss" stuff—that refers, not to Neaman but to Beethoven ; and I challenge you, my dear Gerald, to produce a better description of Beethoven in two words ! *Re* the clichés in my little piece. They were there on purpose, you dear silly ass, as I wanted the *Express* readers to get my meaning and that was the best way of doing it. Anything which is not cliché upsets them and distracts their attention.

There is no danger of the boy losing his head. He is a Jew, and I have never seen noggin more firmly screwed on. As for the injustice to the other fiddlers—rubbish! Either N. is a great player in the making or he is not. If he is not then the other fiddlers won't be envious for long. If he is I don't care how they rage.

Of course the whole thing's a gamble. But I've been gambling all my life! I took a gamble when, on being appointed to the *Saturday Review* in 1921, I devoted my second article to Charlie Chaplin with the title "Hey, But He's Doleful!" This was the first time any film actor had received critical consideration in any English newspaper. I took a gamble when, after the Stage Society's matinée of *Journey's End*, I rushed back to Doughty Street, tore up my broadcast on some other play, wrote another one, and insisted on delivering it. Time has proved me right in both instances. And of my later gambles—Sean O'Casey, who these days is very cross with me, still talks of the reception given by the *Sunday Times* to *Juno and the Paycock* and *The Plough and the Stars*. I took a gamble in the long ago with Charles Laughton and Edith Evans, and recently with Pamela Brown and Sonia Dresdel. I was the first to see a potential dramatist in Peter Ustinov. And others which did not quite turn up trumps, as you know too well. I took a gamble when, only a week ago, I raised Sid Field to the hierarchy of great buffoons. Sometimes these things come off, sometimes they don't. What do I risk? Merely making a fool of myself. Well, I've done that before, and I hope to live long enough to do it again.

Yours ever,

JAMES AGATE

*Dec. 15* Discover that my article about the *Henry V* film has made me unpopular with "the profession." At lunch to-day Noel Coward started to give me a good rousing. The conversation went something like this: NOEL. "Don't you realise that Olivier is the best actor this country has had for centuries?" J. A. "Larry is a very fine actor. But he isn't as good as the Old Man." NOEL. "Irving was a great theatrical figure, but he was a ham actor." J. A. "How old are you?" NOEL. "Forty-five. I saw Irving in *The Lyons Mail* when I was five." J. A. "Let's talk about something else!"

In a way I understand Noel's feelings because I know how actors and their kind reason. Because Larry has intended nobly he has achieved nobly. Because his present venture is better

than Hollywood's misguided efforts his way must be the perfect way. Which is about as logical as to say that because intermittent showers are less wetting than a steady downpour the day is perfectly fine. Earlier on Noel had said, "Don't you realise that the early scenes in *Henry V* are so dull from the cinematographic point of view that Larry just had to begin with the crowd at the Globe Theatre to liven up the dulness ?" I said, "Then you admit the jumble, but justify it ?" Noel said, "I think Larry was perfectly entitled to make Henry a stage player when he wanted a stage player, and a historical figure when he wanted a historical figure." I said, "That is exactly what I mean by a jumble of planes." But Noel couldn't or wouldn't see it.

After lunch found this letter waiting for me :

*Walpole House  
Eton*

Dec. 18, 1944

MY GOD, DEAR JAMES AGATE ! (both these are not in the vocative !) I have just been to the cinema, and after the Hitler film was faced with a thing called *Take It Big*. It did not promise very well, but I resolved to try and share sympathetically the lowbrow merriment which bubbled and squeaked all round me ; but again I say, Oh God, O Montreal ! Ten minutes finished me. Lowbrow ? There was no sort of brow in the dismal affair ; it couldn't have amused an audience of newts. I left the building believing more than ever what you say about education. A ghastly failure ! It must all be hatched over again and hatched different. However, "if gin be his pleasure, let him have gin," as the Doctor said, didn't he, to some pursy remonstrance by Boswell. By the way, it was to-day that he died 160 years ago, and Sir Joshua "laid down his pencil."

A propos of Cardus, that account of Cobden's match by my Uncle Robert in the *Badminton* which was put (rightly ?) in the *Oxford Book of English Prose* was not that of an eyewitness either, as he was at school at the time and never saw a ball of it. I think he would not have forgotten which end Cobden was bowling, as one eyewitness did ! Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* is a fine performance for a boy of seven !

I must stop. I ought to say firmly : Don't answer this, but I can't.

Yours ever,  
GEORGE LYTTELTON

At once I scribbled :

MY DEAR GEORGE LYTTELTON,

No, I won't answer your letter except to refer you to *Ego* 6, page 68, where I talk about my knack of performing conjuring tricks when I am not trying. Just as I read your sentence about Johnson dying 100 years ago to the day I upset the inkpot over my writing-pad. The result was a wonderful "doodle" of the old man. I am having it photographed, and if it's good enough I shall include it in the illustrations to *Ego* 7. No more, except to wish you a Happy Christmas when it comes.

Yours ever,  
JAMES AGATE

Part of an unemotional letter from Charlie Rogers, who looked after me at Oxford :

At last I am getting a little more settled after moving around for the past 2 months. It is not too bad where I am. Living under canvas, food not bad, a different film-show every night, Ensa 2 per week. Flies and the sand are the urgent menace. Have been to Cairo and Alexandria. Cairo is a place I should *not* like to stay at. Alex. not too bad. It is very expensive here, 2½d. for a newspaper, 2/1d. for a bar of chocolate which is no good. Cigs and beer are a little cheaper. The weather is lovely—hot sun all day and my knees are brown already. Long walks in the desert at nights. It gets a bit gritty but one can put up with that. The Wogs—that's the natives—are Filthy Barstards. You wouldn't believe unless you saw it yourself the conditions in which they live and eat. Give me dear old London every time.

*Dec. 16      The word for Lonsdale's new comedy, Another Love Saturday. Story, is common—a word which I suppose nobody understands to-day with the exception of Dicky Helme. But then Dicky belongs to his mother's period as I belong to my mother's. The Victorian age was handicapped by reticence. On what Fielding called "the eve of his apothecosis" Jonathan Wild's lady asked him how he could have used her so barbarously as to call her a bitch. And the eighteenth century knew what Fielding meant. The Victorians knew the thing but rejected the word, which even now cannot be decently and honestly printed in a newspaper. The heroine of Lonsdale's play is pure bitch, and the only way I shall be able to get round this*

to-morrow is to describe her as a lion-tameress husky with passion and sawdust. Towards the end of the last act the hero, who is a combination of gigolo and romantic with an undistributed middle, turns down the bedclothes in the dark and slaps the bitch's bottom. He should have done this in the light, at the end of the first act, when we should all have laughed and gone contentedly home.

Leonard Russell's *Saturday Book* is out this morning. Exciting, stimulating, provocative, irritating, wrong-headed, and always amusing. A book so various that it seems to be not one, but all mankind's epitome, as Dryden so nearly remarked. Or anyhow, every Englishman's. A magnificent show of photographs of English manners and customs, though I don't think this is the moment to reproduce a picture of a German memorial to German dead in the last war, or of Luftwaffe officers as guests at an R.A.F. meeting before the present war. And can Leonard really think that the Prince Consort was head of Queen Victoria's family? Also a section devoted to Art in England, showing that art at its most tiresome. There is, for example, a "Juliet and her Nurse" by Sickert, which makes that young woman look as though she had just plucked the mangled Tybalt from his shroud. There is a Stanley Spencer showing a doll-like Hitler, with a moustache which has come off a neighbouring piece of cretonne, separating a couple of fighting swans surrounded by women suffering from elephantiasis, three of whom sprout wings like angels, while the fourth leans against and strokes the oddest-looking toadstool. There is a landscape by Matthew Smith showing how closely a French forest can resemble the jowl of a blood-hound. Ernest Newman wastes his lucidity and erudition on the gloomily uninteresting subject of the alleged madness of King Ludwig of Bavaria, and fails to draw the parallel with Hitler! Easily the best thing in the book is H. M. Tomlinson's *On Being Out of Date*. I feel that he would sooner go backward than forward. I agree. In my view the England of fifty years ago was better worth living in than the England of to-day.

*Dec. 17* I once debated with Philip Guedalla. He began his *Sunday* speech by saying, "My opponent is one of those people who jump to conclusions. Unfortunately people who jump to conclusions rarely alight on them." None

of the obituary notices has made any reference to the fact that Guedalla was a Jew, and not to do this is like failing to tell me that some distinguished man is a Chinese or a Red Indian. Tell me everything about a man *except* that he is a Jew, and you tell me very little about him ; tell me that he is a Jew, and before you have said any more I know almost all about him. I know that he will have a lively brain, a sense of wit, and a desire to foster the arts.

Sat in the wings at the Rudolf Steiner Hall to listen to a concert given in aid of the Jewish Bachad Fellowship. The artists were Slobodskaya, Kentner, and Ysrah Neaman. The boy played Saint-Saëns's Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso, "Lament" by Bloch, Granados's "Andaluza," and a Paganini-Kreisler Caprice. Slobodskaya was very generous about him. He continues to show great musical taste ; when, being recalled, he might have plunged into some splurgy nonsense he gave the charming "Little White Donkey" of Jacques Ibert. On the whole, I must admit that he didn't quite come up to expectation to-day.

*Dec. 18* Why is it left to me to point out when the great ones *Monday*. of the earth talk nonsense ? By "nonsense" I don't mean a point of view different from my own. I mean demonstrable nonsense—that which a minute's thought will convince any rational person is nonsense. Here is the Very Rev. W. R. Inge, D.D., in to-night's *Evening Standard* : "The penalty for being a bad man is to become a worse man, not to be baked in an oven for all eternity." But that is true only from the point of view of people who think as the Dean does. I can conceive that a prelate of the Church, conceiving some badness in himself, would find his penalty in becoming worse, because his natural inclination is towards the good and away from the bad. But suppose the man to be penalised is an Iago. What says our old friend Hazlitt :

Iago is, to be sure, an extreme instance of the kind ; that is to say, of diseased intellectual activity, with the most perfect indifference to moral good or evil, or rather with a decided preference of the latter, because it falls more readily in with his favourite propensity, gives greater zest to his thoughts and scope to his actions. . . . "Our ancient" is a philosopher, who

fancies that a lie that kills has more point in it than an alliteration or an antithesis ; who thinks a fatal experiment on the peace of a family a better thing than watching the palpitations in the heart of a flea in a microscope ; who plots the ruin of his friends as an exercise for his ingenuity, and stabs men in the dark to prevent *ennui*. His gaiety, such as it is, arises from the success of his treachery ; his ease from the torture he has inflicted on others.

If the torture of others is ease to a man, what penalty is it to enforce upon him greater scope for torture ? The only feasible penalty, and I doubt whether it is feasible, is to give the bad man's badness so much rein that he sickens of it. Let a limbo be invented whereby the Neill Creams shall be given more and more drabs to poison, so that they are ultimately satiated by their own ecstasies. Even so, I doubt whether that kind of satiety would lead to the genuine repentance which is the beginning of goodness. A rest would work wonders. What the Dean doesn't see is that just as the good man fulfils himself by being good, so the bad man fulfils himself by being bad. Whence it follows that the only real penalty for being a bad man is to be forced to become a better man.

*Dec. 19* There is a *Lost Chord*, *Salut d'Amour*, *Valse Triste*, *Tuesday*. *Turkish March* side to my writing which makes the *New Statesman* reviewer hold his pocket-handkerchief before his streaming eyes. Chris asked me to write a leader-page article explaining to *Express* readers why they aren't down in the mouth at not getting the war over by Christmas. Chris knows, and I know, and every sensible person knows, that for this purpose the Mortimer-Stonier-Annan stuff, even supposing I could do it, is no good, for the reason that it would be over the heads of *D.E.* readers. But the highbrow gumphs don't know this. Nor do they realise that quotations and stories which they know backwards are gems of new thought to the public I am catering for. To shrug one's shoulders just isn't good enough. Here is a job to be tackled as simply as possible but also as little cheaply. Here is my shot :

#### BERLIN PAPERS PLEASE COPY

Reader, have you ever heard the phrase, "the defects of his qualities" ? Of course you have. The first defect of a

nation with a volatile temperament is its proneness to absurdity.

The Italians, for instance, have a genius for opera. Admirable! It leads them off-stage to behave like the heroes and heroines of Puccini. They kiss, gesticulate, and jabber, all for what seems to us little or no reason.

The Germans, on the other hand, have a dull, asinine ponderousness which both in private and in world affairs makes them comport themselves like the strutting braggarts of Wagnerian music-drama.

The average Englishman doesn't know what you mean by temperament except possibly in connection with the hysteria of film-stars. He takes his pleasures sadly. Or, as that great English writer Rudyard Kipling put it, he belongs to

The breed that take their pleasures as Saint Lawrence took his grid.

Have you ever heard the phrase, "The qualities of his defects"? I think not often.

Now what, from the Continental point of view, are the English defects? Well, one would say first of all the dislike of showing emotion. The Englishman prides himself on keeping a stiff upper lip, whereas your foreigner's lip is, so to speak, all over the place.

Asked what he thought of the prospects of what was to be the battle of Waterloo, the Duke of Wellington pointed to a British soldier who was staring open-mouthed at a statue in some Brussels park, and said, "It all depends on that article." Imagine Mr Churchill, on being asked what he thought of the prospects of the Battle of Britain, pointing to some young airman and saying, "It all depends on that article." Well, it did. And that article proceeded to give its life with less fuss than most foreigners make about buying a seat for a theatre.

The opposite of temperament is phlegm. And if temperament be a defect there can be no doubt that phlegm, as the English possess it, is a saving grace. With temperament goes excitability; with phlegm goes an unaffected cheerfulness. Temperament means the heights of ecstasy and the depths of anguish, with nothing much between. Phlegm isn't greatly moved either way. It steers a middle course.

God rest you merry, gentlemen,  
Let nothing you dismay

is an admirable carol for Englishmen. A tendency to or taste

for dismay is not and never has been a property of the English character.

Chesterton relates how, one very foggy evening, he was driven in a hansom cab down what turned out to be a blind alley, the horse stopping only when its nose touched the wall. Just as he was beginning to frame the thought that perhaps this wouldn't quite do, he heard his cabman say : " Blimey, this is a bit of orlright ! "

Dickens knew what he was about when he created Mark Tapley. Martin Chuzzlewit, recovering from a dangerous illness, was, you remember, entirely dependent upon his servant, who in turn became desperately ill. Asked how he felt, Mark replied : " Floored for the present, sir, but jolly ! "

But Dickens was only going back to an old model. Pepys writes : " I went out to Charing Cross, to see Major-general Harrison hanged, drawn and quartered ; which was done there, he looking as cheerful as any man could do in that condition." The Major-general knew he was about to be floored, and was as jolly as circumstances permitted. The point about the English soldier, sailor, merchant seaman, airman, Home Guard, factory worker, and plain civilian is that the drearier the circumstances the jollier he becomes.

The failure to end the war before Christmas would be a floofer to some of us if we were to think about it. But we don't think about it. There is in all of us something of Dickens's Mrs Gamp, who, when asked about the future, said : " Excuse me. Seek not to proticipate, but take 'em as they come and as they go."

Say to any Englishman in the words of the poet Browning : " The best is yet to be," and he will stare at you as the horse in that hansom stared at that wall. Tell him in the words of a lesser poet, one Philander Chase Johnson, " Cheer up, the worst is yet to come ! " and he will grin all over his honest, cheerful mug.

I remember a melodrama produced shortly after the last war. It was about the typical " old sweat " of the period and his two cronies, Alf and Bert. All three had doffed their uniforms to become miners, and the mine had become flooded, and the water was up to their necks, and they had sung " Abide with Me." Then came a pause, and Alf was heard asking : " I say, Bert, is your feet gettin' damp ? " I say,

reader, is you depressed because the war looks like lasting a little longer? No. Is you gettin' cold feet? NO. Berlin papers please copy.

*Dec. 21* The question is not what we are to do with *Thursday*. Germany after the war but with this country. My idea is to sentence the upper classes to the same fate as the lower—perpetual hard labour without imprisonment.

*Dec. 22* Leo came in this morning with two letters and *Friday*, saying: "I think you'll have to print this kid in *Ego* 7. You and I can afford to wait a couple of years, but to a boy of his age it's an eternity." Here is the first letter:

18 Park View Avenue  
Harold's Cross  
Dublin  
*Dec. 2nd '44*

DEAR L. P.,

I have gathered in the past from *Ego* that, despite those barbed, cynical witticisms to which you give vent, there is no one in James's circle possessed of a heart like yours! That your heart is of the finest part of pure gold is proved by the fact that you deigned to answer my absurd guff. I was as glad of your signature as I was of James Evershed Agate's when I received a little, very *patient* note from him in July. I was sorry he didn't include the Evershed part of his name. You *may* be interested to know why a person of my tender years—I'm fifteen in April—should lavish his devotion on a critic of James's eccentricity. Well, Mr A. opened for me the door of a new and brilliant world—a world of culture and, to a certain degree, refinement. If ever I have any pretensions to literary culture I may thank James. He alone is responsible for my love of Shakespeare. I thank him from the bottom of my poor schoolboy's heart. With my first introduction to J. A. my love of reading grew to a love of *good* reading. He made me realise the glory of the stage as compared with the cinema. He introduced me to, and made me familiar with, the divine Sarah. She stands like a glittering ornament in a corner of my brain—Oh pooh! I suppose you're thinking that this is just another example of my particular kind of nonsense. Well, believe me, it's not. I'd be obliged if you let James read this effusion. Tell him that despite his almost Ben Jonsonish

coarseness I think he is one of the finest writers in the English of to-day.

Sincerely,  
J. E. JORDAN

Leo replied, saying that I hoped to find room for his letter in *Ego* 8, and would he mind being referred to as "a talented little beast"? To-day comes this:

18 Park View Avenue  
Harold's Cross  
Dublin  
December 17th '44

MR P. !!!

Despite your Heart of Gold, you can be deuced malicious! I don't for a minute credit your story of my letter being printed in *Ego* 8. Why? Because I know well that James can't be further than *Ego* 7. Like our Mr Shaw (what a mature ego I have!) I'm a "hopeless duffer at mathematics," but I know the fundamental rules of addition and subtraction. According to my calculations *Ego* 8 won't be started till 1946! Of course I may be wrong, but I think you're pulling my leg. Anyhow, thanks for replying. At this point a happy thought strikes me. James should publish a book called *Agatian Nights*, containing all the witty things said by you and that extraordinary Mr Dent during the past twenty years. But to return to *Ego*, I'd adore having my letter printed in *Ego* 7, but not in *Ego* 8. I don't object to being called a "talented little beast." However, I'd rather it was "ingenious" than "talented." "Talented" is rather hard to believe, especially from Mr A. I have decided in future to refer to Mr A. as the high-priest of the goddess Sarah. Oh, Mr P.! I also play the piano atrociously. Through experience I've discovered that anyone who plays the piano is talented! My tastes in music are terribly lowbrow—hackneyed things like Rimsky-Korsakov's Spanish Caprice, the Prelude to Act 3 of *Lohengrin*, and the Grieg Piano Concerto in A minor. But I'm getting prosy, so I finish.

As ever, yours sincerely,  
J. E. JORDAN

Dec. 24 Yfrah Neaman and Ivor Newton gave a joint recital Sunday. at the Stage Door Canteen this afternoon. Hundreds of soldiers and sailors with their girls, in spite of the fact that dancing wasn't to begin till seven. I wasn't too well

pleased with Neaman's playing last Sunday ; he explained to-day that he felt poorly on that occasion but didn't say anything about it because artists should never make excuses. He played the Dvořák Sonatina in G very beautifully this afternoon, with a really lovely tone, finishing with some Kreisler fireworks. Newton played a group of pieces of the wittiest disparity, starting with that mercetricious little G flat Valse of Chopin, followed by Bach's " Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring," and ending with two of Granados's *Goyescas*. Which jumble reminds me of a vow I have made in connection with the *Henry V* film. This is never to talk to actors about planes. The only plane any actor understands is the one that takes him to Hollywood !

*Christmas Day.* No newspapers. And in view of the way Rundstedt's advance is going at the moment there is the possibility that no news may be bad news. (I do not, and will not, believe that the setback is more than temporary.) In the meantime the Tube has declared a one day's strike. If I had my way I should take one driver, one guard, one carriage-cleaner, and one ticket-collector, line them up to-morrow morning against one side of Trafalgar Square, and shoot them. I should also take four directors of the London Transport Board or whoever runs the Tube, line them up against the opposite side, and shoot them too. I don't care what the quarrel is about or who is in the wrong. I only know that the Tube should have been kept running at any sacrifice, whether of money or face. I am perfectly prepared to be miserable at all holiday seasons ; what I am angry about is that thousands of young men and women in the Services should have their holiday ruined, and that the staff of the Café Royal should have to walk as many as eight or ten miles in the fog after their day's work. Did the Government run extra buses or call for volunteers ? No. It just sat on its arse and did nothing. This country, England, announces its intention of keeping in order for all time Germany, the most cunning, treacherous, ruthless, and efficient nation in the world, a nation whose fifth column, whose *underground*, is even now preparing for the next war. And we cannot keep a few paltry miles of our potty little Tube running. How Hitler and Co. must laugh !

*Boxing Day.* Every year about this date I make up my accounts in the matter of work done. Here is this year's account :

<i>Sunday Times</i>	57,000 words
<i>Daily Express</i>	42,000 "
<i>Tatler</i>	55,000 "
<i>Ego 7</i>	140,000 "
<i>Noblesse Oblige</i>	12,000 "
Odd articles	10,000 "
	<hr/>
	316,000 words

Turning up *Ego 4* (page 152), I find a calculation showing that between September 1921 and December 1939 I had written a total of 5,000,000 words. Also note *Ego 7*, entry for January 25. Now let us do a little sum :

December 1939	5,000,000 words
" 1940	350,000 "
" 1941	250,000 "
" 1942	265,000 "
" 1943	300,000 "
" 1944	316,000 "
	<hr/>
	6,481,000 words

From which it would seem that in twenty-three years I have written, roughly, one and a half times the number of words in Balzac's *Comédie Humaine*.

*Dec. 27* "The frog he would a-wooing go." But I doubt *Wednesday*. whether he courted his mistress as assiduously as I have courted fame, and now appear to have won it, or some measure of it, judging by the awards in this week's *Time and Tide* Literary Competition. The subject was a suggested Académie Anglaise of forty members, comparable to the Académie Française. G. M. Trevelyan heads the list with 80 votes—the English will always fall for a writer who is good in the sense that Mrs Baines's furniture was "good"—followed by Shaw with 60. H. G. Wells and E. M. Forster have 52 votes each, Masefield and Maugham 47 each. And so on and so on, with lots of Sitwells. I just scrape in with 18 votes,

in company with H. E. Bates, Lord David Cecil, Noel Coward, C. S. Lewis, Desmond MacCarthy, and Harold Nicolson. I confess I am mightily gratified.

And think of the lovely people who are not in ! G. W. Bishop, G. W. Stonier, and anybody who thinks the *Ego* books dull and repetitive. As Beetle said : “*Je vais gloater. Je vais gloater tout le blessed afternoon. Jamais j'ai gloaté comme je gloaterai aujourd'hui.*”

*Dec. 28      Letter from Jock :*  
*Thursday.*

*E5 Ward  
 R.N. Hospital  
 Haslar  
 Hants*

*27th December, 1944*

DEAR JAMIE,

I duly saw the film of *Henry V* a week ago. And I am more than ever flummoxed by all the muddy bother you have been creating on the subject.

Since you like taking things in their order, let me take them so.

(1) I just cannot agree that the film is like (*a*) your Blackfriars picture of a lion eating real chicken-bones, or (*b*) any old pub's picture of the Houses of Parliament with a real clock inserted into Big Ben. This is your wearisome old trick of setting up a sham analogy and trusting to its audacity to excuse its falseness. The film—it seems to me aesthetically successful beyond my wildest dreams and far beyond my faltering anticipations, sadly dashed at the last glimpse I had of it (shown *backwards* and with neither colour nor music)— Where was I ? The film is strikingly true to its own values, which are those of the cinema.

(2) You then go off at a tangent to ask whether a film of *Othello* would give us “ all those moving accidents by flood and field,” and one of *A. and C.* reveal Antony making a camp dinner of strange flesh and washing it down with the stale of horses. This is irrelevant and impertinent (in the pure sense). There is no silly illustrating of Shakespeare's language in *Henry*. When, for example, Burgundy has his lovely dandelion-and-burdock speech the eye is merely invited to traverse the landscape seen through the palace windows. You give no

credit to the integrity and artistry of the film in this and other respects.

(3) You sum up the paragraph with: "A play's a play and a film's a film, and there's an end on't." But that's only the beginning on't! This is a film. It does *not* try to be that half-and-half thing which you go on perversely hankering after—a play photographed as it is acted. How you can go on functioning as a film critic for all these years without being able to seize this elementary principle passes the comprehension of this your ex-secretary and always will!

(4) You proceed to call yourself the "mighty cannon" of film criticism, and all the other practitioners of that craft "puny grapeshot." This is just daft. I don't rate English film criticism very highly. But if you must weigh yourself in the balance against the whole pack of them I must in all fairness and coolness of judgment allow that the first six to enter my mind—the Women of Sunday (Caroline Lejeune and Dilys), the *Times* boys (Cookman and Dudley Carew), and at least two of the dailies (Richard Winnington for mordant, canine wit and Elspeth Grant for the feline sort) are vastly more *au fait* with films and film-making than you normally even pretend to be.

(5) Next you offer me "the sociological line that it is better the mob should have bastard Shakespeare than none at all." But why bastard? Wherefore base? as Gloucester's Edmund says. The film can do Shakespeare nothing but good if it ever reaches the masses—though I personally will be astonished if it ever gets anywhere near the masses. On the night when Sidney Bernstein has the temerity to put it on at one of his Odeons, that Odeon will for once be empty and everybody will be found at the rival Ritz gaping at *Kismet*, which, instead of blank verse and an Eisensteinish Battle of Agincourt, has blank Marlene Dietrich's gilded thighs. I hope I am wrong, but I doubt it.

(6) Yes—though you won't believe it—Laurence and I did have a "grand pow-wow on first principles." I thought then, and still think, that *Henry* is the one play which most directly asks to be filmed. The idea of beginning and ending in the Globe on Bankside was his entirely—but was evolved out of our pow-wows. It occurred immediately after an inordinate pow-wow at the Garrick Club, and he telephoned me in the middle of the night about it. It may be called a trick—but I still think it a brilliantly effective one. *I would, in strict and sober fact, begin every film of Shakespeare in exactly the same way.* (That shows how little I agree with your Theory of

Planes.) The almost insurmountable difficulty with all the other plays is that Shakespeare himself gives no handle for such treatment.

(7) And filming of Shakespeare must, by its very nature, be something of a compromise. Who deniges of it? And in any case why do you quiver and quake at the mere mention of the word? Lots of excellent things have been and continue to be compromises. So are some of our institutions. It was as plain as a pikestaff, even before Samuel Butler came along to point it out, that Episcopalianism is one huge compromise between Rome and Calvinism. And I presume you won't call Episcopalianism a deplorable, an unworthy, or even a wholly inartistic thing!

Yours aye,  
Jock

P.S. Somebody has shown me your *Tatler* article on *Henry*. It is what stage folk call a "rave." I am totally unable to reconcile it with the "great argument" of your letters to me and your "first principles" attack in the *Sunday Times*. My master, are you mad, or what are you?—as Malvolio practically says.

My reply :

*Queen Alexandra Mansions, W.C.2*  
*December 28th, 1944*

DEAR JOCK,

(1) You do not deny that the film is on two planes. Well, I won't have things on two planes. Walkley laid it down over and over again that a work of art must be consistent with itself and remain on the same plane, and that nothing else matters a b——! A. B. W. put it more elegantly, but this is what he meant, and I am with him. I don't want to see paintings of race-horses with glass beads for eyes and bits of real horschair for mane and tail. I will not agree to Larry or anybody else being an actor playing Henry one minute, and being the real Henry the next. I will not have the magic of Shakespeare's words blunted by a pre-view of the thing they're about. You've simply got to choose—you must give me either that wonderful death scene of George Robey showing that mountain of flesh dwindled to nothing, or Quickly's speech about how Falstaff's nose was as sharp as a pen. I WILL NOT HAVE BOTH. You tell me the film is "strikingly true to its own values." I am concerned for Shakespeare's values.

(2) There is no question of going off at a tangent. In showing Falstaff's death you have done something which Shakespeare deliberately withheld, preferring the description to the fact. I see no difference whatever between Falstaff's death and Othello's "moving accidents," Antony's strange dinner, and Cleopatra's barge. It would be amusing to see how Antony, enthroned i' the market-place, did sit alone, whistling to the air. I suppose at this point you would flood the cinema with Chanel No. 6, this being the strange invisible perfume hitting the sense of the adjacent wharfs? What I saw during Burgundy's darnel-and-burdock speech was two little ragamuffins leaning over a gate, so that I murmured with Betsey Trotwood, "Janet, heat the bath!"

(3) "Sir, you *may* wonder!" What you may not do, Jock, is to mis-state. I do not hanker, perversely or otherwise, after films made out of photographed plays. Perhaps it would be simpler if I put it in tabular form:

(a) I do not want to see Shakespeare's plays filmed.

(b) If they must be filmed the film should be made by photographing the acted play.

(c) Alternatively the film should be kept away from and out of the theatre altogether.

(d) What is not permissible is something which is half theatre and half actuality.

Many years ago there was a popular song which ran: "If you're inside you can't be outside; If you're outside you can't be inside. . . ." This, to my way of thinking, is the perfect criticism of your film.

(4) Either I have mis-dictated, or Leo has mis-typed, or you have mis-read. (The letter has gone to the printer's and I can't refer to it.) I intended to suggest that I have twenty years of Shakespearean criticism behind me—possibly I meant to bring *Brief Chronicles* to your mind—and that nine-tenths of our film critics have never seen a Shakespeare play in their lives. (If they have they have not understood it.) This nine-tenths was not meant to include the brilliant practitioners you mention. By the way, Jock, how comes it that you haven't grasped that I do not pretend, and never have pretended, to be a film critic? Since the paper I write for is called the *Tattle* the proper thing for me to contribute is Tattle. Not to say Tittle. Which I do.

(5) Quotation, my dear boy, is a two-edged weapon. What Edmund says is "Why bastard? wherefore base? *When my dimensions are as well compact. . .*" The dimensions of your film are NOT as well compact. They insist on being all

over the place, Bankside and Somme-side as well. Or whatever river Agincourt is on.

(6) Then you pow-wowed all wrong.

(7) Since you challenge me, that is exactly what I do think about Episcopalianism. No bishop is going to come it over me!

(8) Your P.S. How can you call a "rave" anything that has for heading "Magnificent, If You Like It"? And which returns a devastating answer to the question: What more do I want than the whole Battle of Agincourt? "The answer is that as a lover of Shakespeare *in the theatre* there isn't anything I want *less*. In my view the thing is a magnificent shot at something I, personally, don't want to see attempted."

No, my dear Jock, if anybody is raving it is not

Your auld, havering, but not yet daft,

JAMIE

P.S. Do you like this? Overheard in a bar:

AMERICAN SOLDIER. "You can't argue with me. I'm ignorant!"

*Dec. 29 Have at last tackled E. M. Forster's *A Passage to Friday. Routed.* Does the book give me an insight into the Indian mind? But I don't want an insight into the Indian mind!* With me this annihilatory prejudice—perhaps a disease—is entirely arbitrary. It applies to peoples and countries. Chinese, Negroes, Red Indians, yes; Cochin-Chinese, Mexicans, all Indians other than Red, no. I would rather read a dull book about France than a masterpiece about Germany—a legacy from schoolboy boredom with those fearsome Electors of Saxony. I can read all of Pierre Loti except *Pêcheur d'Islande*. I desire to know nothing about any part of Greenland, Lapland, Holland, Denmark, Sweden. Ibsen plus the News in Norwegian has told me all I want to know about that country. *Hedda Gabler* is very nearly my favourite play, but no sum would tempt me to read Tesman's book on the Industries of Brabant during the Middle Ages. Which means that I am not, in the strict sense, a critic. A critic, I understand, is one who, having no views of his own, or willing to sink his personal opinions, puts himself in the author's place, accepts his author's ideas, and confines himself to deciding how well or how

ill he has expressed them. (Desmond does this fish-like, cold-blooded thing with genius.) For me criticism is passionate or it is nothing. A play is a good play if it is about a subject in which I have, or can get up, some sort of interest, and if it is handled in a way that interests, or that I can pretend interests, me. Because my view of women is entirely Oriental do I take *Man and Superman* to be a bad play? Yes. To me Ann Whitefield is as ridiculous as she is tiresome. So with Forster's story. Since I didn't care what Aziz did or didn't do to Quested in the cave, or whether she asked for it, I had great difficulty in finishing a book about which the highbrows make so much fuss. Put it this way. I would not be Viceroy of India if they promised me cavalcades of houris kohinoor'd in every nostril, and fleets of elephants with gold toe-nails and pearl-ringed tusks, piloted by Sabu, his brothers, and his cousins. Whereas I would jump at the Governorship of the Gold Coast in spite of its smells and squashed noses. The thing which frightens me is that, even if I doted on India and Indians, I still should not understand the fuss about this book.

*Dec. 30*      "Your old friends have not forgotten you after Saturday. all," says Leo this morning, handing me a letter.

"I opened this by mistake. What a pity you have never set eyes on any of these delightful creatures!" And I read :

24 Woglinda Road, N.W. 3

29th Dec. 1944

MY REVERED MR AGATE!

Not because I did not think always of you, dear Master—not because I do not inspect your artikels of Genius with firest Interesse—no, not through this have you not heard from me for so long time. But because of other, more serios Reasons.

I write to you now in Confidenz. I know you for a Philosoph, a deep In-gripper into the heart of Man. And in my trouble I turn myself to you, and seek for Consolation and perhaps Advise.

The truth is : my marriage is become a little tragik. My husband Erasmus, after the first few Flitterweeks, threw his eyes on an Other. On what Other? You have rightly

guessed—on the singer Greta Goldhcimer. Blind that I was, to not have seen to what all those duetts and cadenzas, those sekret Studdies, those Exercices—haha, that I do not laugh! —must lead. But hear, my Freind. Soon found I out what hour has struck—*Erasmus loves her!* One day, coming back so tired from standing in a Kew in Eppel's *Delikatessenhandlung*, I hear singing, I open the room-door, I see—*Gerechter Himmel!* —I see my Erasmus *gelockt* in the fat arms of that *Mensch!* They kiss. They murmur Love-words. I stand there *dumm, stumm*; from Fright, from Rage, I drop my pikled Hарings, the Leberwurst falls on the Flor. Now they see me, they draw quick from another. Erasmus redens, Greta like a Hypokrit, says: “We are holding a *Probe*.” A pritty *Probe*! I disgise myself, and say only ironisch: “I congratulat you both on a perfekt Performanz!” They let no word from themselves, they are *paff*. Then I draw myself back into the Sleep-room and become hysterisch. What can I do, Master? I love my Erasmus, he is so beautiful, so soft—“Seines Mundes Lächeln, Seiner Augen Gewalt”—yes, he is my Faust and I am poor Margarete. But I am resolft. I am his wife—and I shall make good Meen to bad Play.

But here something more agreebel. *I am in the Hope!!* Yes, Master, my Child is underway. *Gott sei Dank*, it is MY child and not Greta's! Not that that *Veltel* could have a child, for that is she too old. I pray it will be a Boy. Already have I given him his Names—they shall be Siegfried Tristan Walther after some of his fathers wagnerisch Rolls. If it is willed that it is a Dauter then after my Familie, Kunigunde Wilhelmine Anastasia. So I am not quite unhappy. Let Greta laugh till she bursts her fat breasts—such a Joy as mine shall she never have. *Ja, die Vorschung ist gerecht.*

Dear Master, I kiss your Hand,

and remain

Your sorrowfull, joyfull, but

Always most Respektfull,

ERNA GLOHWURM

(Geb. KATZENGEBISS)

Leo says that the time has come for me to say good-bye to these remarkable people. And who has a better right? If it had not been for him they would never have been conceived. To me they have become real.

Dec. 31 Four letters received this week. From Bulawayo, *Sunday*. Rhodesia; from Roberts Heights, South Africa; from Dar-es-Salaam, East Africa; from Colombo. All having reference to *Ego*. This argues a kind of fame, my craving for which I find disquieting when taken in connection with Milton's "last infirmity." Yet if I read this correctly Milton means us to understand fame during an author's lifetime, and warns us that just when we

think to burst out into sudden blaze,  
Comes the blind Fury with th' abhorred shears.

But what about fame after one's lifetime? Is it ignoble to desire to leave something behind one? Would Jane Austen have taken the trouble to tell the story of the Bennets if her "two inches of ivory" had been two inches of butterscotch? What painter is not vexed by the thought that in five hundred years his colours will have faded and his canvas rotted? John Smith, if he is a genuine artist, wants his work to live *for his work's sake*, not merely as a memorial to John Smith. To come down to brass tacks. How much of immortality do I desire for *Ego*? Decades or centuries? Epochs or æons? No answer is possible; computation would dizzy arithmetic. If Seven should be *Ego*'s last, I am content to say with Flora Finchings: "The withered chaplet is perished the column is crumbled and the pyramid is standing upside down upon its what's-his-name call it not giddiness call it not weakness call it not folly I must now retire into privacy and look upon the ashes of departed joys no more."

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